

*Master Guide for* **TEAM SPORTS**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**



*James  
Williams*

**Amherst Media®**  
PUBLISHER OF PHOTOGRAPHY BOOKS



## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to my two children, Lisa Marie and James Matthew.  
They would make any parent proud.

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# INTRODUCTION

**P**hotographing organized sports teams can be a lucrative business. Many photographers in large metropolitan areas make a very comfortable living photographing nothing but sports leagues. Our studio, on the other hand, is located in Warren, OH, where the population is approximately

50,000 people. Though we come from a small town, we still manage to photograph several thousand players each year. This goes to show that there is money to be made in any market. Photography can be very profitable, but only if you have the passion and desire to do what it takes to become successful.

Like many things in life, photographing sports leagues is not as easy as it may look to the novice. After all, if it were easy, everyone would be doing it.

Because you do not need a studio to win contracts to photograph either school or league athletes and teams, bargain-priced, part-time photographers who are looking for some extra weekend cash will probably be some of your main competition. And, make no mistake, the competition is quite

Kids (and parents) look forward to the team photography every year. To succeed in this competitive business, you have to deliver great images and great customer service.





Team sports are a big part of many kids' lives, and portraits that show them in their uniforms are treasured mementos of these good times.

fierce, so you must have superior equipment, top-notch lighting know-how, and excellent organizational skills.

In this book, I will walk you through what you need to know to be successful at photographing organized sports leagues. If you are living in a small community, chances are you will need to do other types of photography to make a living. If you just want to supplement your day-job income, this may be the way to do it. Sports photography may even be a good way to see if you are cut out to operate a full-time photography business.

**I WILL WALK YOU THROUGH WHAT YOU  
NEED TO KNOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL AT  
PHOTOGRAPHING SPORTS LEAGUES.**

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**J**ames Williams has been involved with photography for more than twenty years. He photographed his first wedding in 1984. The following year he photographed approximately ten high-school seniors in the basement of his home. In 1986, he photographed almost one hundred seniors, again in the basement, while still continuing to photograph weddings. In 1987, the decision was made to build a studio addition onto his home. Today James and his wife Cathy operate a high-end wedding, family, and high-school senior business, along with taking on sports-league and high-school-senior contracts.

James is certified through the Professional Photographers of America (PPA) as well as the Professional Photographers of Ohio. In 2001, he was inducted into the prestigious Society of Professional Photographers of Ohio. Membership is by invitation only. In 2002, he was elected president of the Society of Northern Ohio Professional Photographers. Based out of Cleveland, this organization has a membership of over seventy-five members. In February of 2004, James earned the Accolade of Photographic Mastery from Wedding and Portrait Photographers International (WPPI). He is one of only eight photographers to hold this degree from his home state of Ohio. In 2005, James completed the requirements for his Craftsman degree from PPA and also completed the requirements for the Accolade of Outstanding Photographic Achievement from WPPI.

Williams lectures several times a year at various photography organizations and presents lighting, posing, and marketing seminars at his studio. He is the author of *How to Create a High Profit Photography Business in Any Market*, also from Amherst Media.



# 1. ESTABLISH YOUR BUSINESS

**A**s I mentioned in the introduction, there *is* money to be made in photography. Still, I think it's fair to say that the photography business is not an *easy* way to make a living. For that reason, it only makes sense to be smart about your business, implementing policies and strategies designed to give you an edge on the competition. These basic techniques apply not just to team and sports photography, but to the operation of all types of studios. Additional techniques will be covered in chapter 9.

## SET SHORT AND LONG-RANGE GOALS

Before you start your journey into sports photography, or any other ambition for that matter, stop and think about where you want to be with your new endeavor several years from now. Without a plan or “road map,” your chances of reaching your goal are slim. Starting with the end in mind is one of many concepts I learned in 1997 at a Stephen R. Covey seminar. For those of you who have never heard of him, Mr. Covey is an extremely successful lecturer and writer. His concepts and ideas are used throughout corporate America. Whether you are running General Motors or a small photography business, certain business principles apply. I highly suggest you read Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* (Free Press, 2004).

Talk to any business owner and they will tell you how important short- and long-range goals are for the success of your business. Short-range goals will be your daily or weekly goals. Your long-range goals establish where you want to be in one to five years—or even farther down the line. It's best to have these goals written down. Be sure that they are difficult but attainable.

When I stumbled into the photography business over two decades ago, I decided that I wanted to do everything first class—with both my photography and with my clients. As a result, we have always been completely honest with our clients over the years. This may sound naive . . . but I once assumed that *all* businesses were honest with *all* their customers *all* of the time. Sad to say, but that is not always the case. A couple of years ago we hired a

STOP AND THINK ABOUT

WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

WITH YOUR NEW ENDEAVOR

SEVERAL YEARS FROM NOW.

**FACING PAGE**—As in sports, success in business requires setting goals and working hard to achieve them.





lovely young lady who had worked for several years in a bridal salon. During the course of the interview, she asked if she would ever have to be dishonest. I thought for a moment, wondering why she would ask such a question and replied, “Of course not.” Her asking me that question told me two things. First, she was a very honest person and was not comfortable being dishonest. Second, it told me that she was working in an environment that was sometimes a little loose with the truth to clients. I found out later that the salon she came from had a reputation for being deceptive with their customers. The bottom line is you cannot continue to run a successful business without integrity and honesty; both employees and customers talk among themselves, and sooner or later the truth comes out.

Once you have identified your goals, share your vision with everyone who has anything to do with your business. The employees you hire will have an impact on whether your goals are achieved, so you must surround yourself with successful people—you cannot make it happen by yourself. When I

**SHARE YOUR VISION WITH EVERYONE**

**WHO HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH**

**YOUR BUSINESS.**



Top-quality service is critical to success in the team-sports photography business.

Making your clients feel special will result in more memorable images—and it will help you establish a great reputation in your community.

**HAVING LOTS OF SIZZLE IN YOUR  
OPERATION WILL SET YOU APART  
FROM YOUR COMPETITION.**



started out in the photography business, my short-range goal was to create the best images I possibly could and to provide the best-possible service to my clients. One thing is certain: second-rate service will get you into more trouble with your clients than second-rate photography.

**MAKE EVERYTHING REFLECT YOUR IMAGE**

Making your clients feel special is a very important factor in running your photography business. Having lots of sizzle in your operation will set you apart from your competition.

Just what is meant by “sizzle”? In a fine restaurant, a hostess will take you to your table and probably even place the napkin on your lap. When you re-



Depending on the terms of your contract, as a team-sports photographer you may be called on to photograph the band, clubs, and other subjects. For more on this, see chapter 4.

ceive your dinner, it will be on fine china with a beautiful presentation—everything will be placed just perfectly on the dinner plate. During your meal, your glass will be kept full, and the waiter will ask several times if there is anything further he can do for you. Now, you could have gone to a much less fancy restaurant and gotten a meal for much less money, but you chose a fine dining experience instead. So, why do people frequent restaurants that charge so much more? They want to experience the sizzle!

In the restaurant, the sizzle is the service, the presentation of the food, and the general atmosphere of the dining experience. In your studio, sizzle



**THERE MUST BE  
COMPELLING REASONS  
FOR THE CLIENT TO CHOOSE YOU  
OVER SOMEONE ELSE.**

starts with how the phone is answered—but it also includes the décor and how you dress, as well as your price lists, stationary, brochures, and business cards. In short, everything that your clients come into contact with should reflect a very professional image. Without this sizzle, you will never be able to charge higher prices. After all, there must be compelling reasons for the client to choose you over someone else.

**Develop Great Telephone Skills.** The telephone is the single most important piece of equipment in your business! It is the device that all of your business and money flow through. Yet, unfortunately it is neglected by many studio owners.

Far too many studios rely on an answering machine to take most of their calls. We have actually had clients surprised that a real person answered their call. They have called other studios and gotten an answering machine most of the time. Here is a little test you can conduct to find out how good or bad your competition is at answering the phone. On a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday (many studios are closed on Monday or Friday), call all of your competitors in the yellow pages during business hours. I guarantee you that about 70 percent of the time you are going to get an answering machine! We have done this several times in our area and every single time we come up with the same results. When your machine picks up, what you are really saying to a client is, “I will talk to you when it is convenient for *me*, not for *you*.” I can’t even imagine how much business we have gotten over the years just by doing a basic thing like answering the telephone.

Answering the telephone correctly will also set you apart from your competition. I’m always amazed at how poorly most business telephones are answered (if they even get answered at all). Randomly call a few businesses from the phone book, and you will find out how *not* to answer the phone. Remember, the telephone is usually the first contact a client has with your business. If you have a person with poor telephone skills answering calls at your business, over time it will cost you thousands and thousands of dollars. For instance, I have one business associate whose receptionist always answers the phone with, “Good afternoon!” It might be 10AM, but at his studio it is “afternoon.” I’ve mentioned this to my friend several times, but nothing has changed. Do you think I am the only one who has noticed this? You should take a long, hard look at how your telephone is being answered. The following is some basic telephone etiquette that will help you be more professional sounding to your clients.

*Answer Professionally.* Begin by answering the phone by the third ring. Speak slowly, clearly, and concisely, saying, “Thank you for calling \_\_\_\_\_ Photography. This is \_\_\_\_\_ speaking.” You have

thanked the caller and told them who they are speaking to. Most of the time, the client will call you by name before they address what they are calling about.

Before assigning anyone to your telephone, be certain they have been trained or have lots of experience dealing with clients over the phone. Mastering phone skills, like mastering sales skills, takes time and practice. Don't allow employees to practice their phone skills on your clients. Be sure they are properly trained. A pleasant, well-trained person on the telephone can be a real asset.

There are certain phrases you should never use with a client:

1. **"We can't do that."** What a thing to say to a client! Instead say, "That might be difficult," or "Let me see what we can do." If possible, find an alternative solution.
2. **"You'll have to . . ."** The only thing a client has to do in life is die someday! Instead, say, "You'll need to . . ." or "Here's how we can help with that." Offer advice, but never say a client has to do something.
3. **"I don't know."** Instead, say, "Let me check on it, and I will let you know as soon as possible."
4. **"No . . ."** Never say "no" at the beginning of a sentence. Try to turn your statement into a positive response. An example might be, "We would be happy to replace the product."
5. **"Hang on a sec. I'll be right back."** This is the one you hear all the time when you call a business. Instead, you should say, "Mrs. Smith, may I put you on hold for a minute or two?" Hopefully, you have a message system with music for your clients to listen to while they are on hold.

*Invest in a Professional Phone System.* If you want to sound like a real first-class operation to a new client, have a phone system installed. A phone system is a piece of equipment that takes the place of your answering machine. It gives you the ability to have a message play when you put one of your clients on hold or if all of the incoming lines are busy.

We have two different messages on our system. The first message comes on if both of our phone lines are busy and tells the caller we are currently busy, our business hours, and that we will call them back as soon as we can. Since we have two lines, plus a fax line, coming into our business, clients seldom get our voice-mail system during regular business hours. The second message is heard when a client calls and is put on hold. Having dead air on

**FACING PAGE**—When you present yourself as a professional, you inspire the trust needed to put your subjects at ease.

**A PLEASANT,  
WELL-TRAINED PERSON  
ON THE TELEPHONE  
CAN BE A REAL ASSET.**





the telephone with a client on the other end is something I would definitely not recommend, since the client may not be sure whether or not she is still on hold or has accidentally been disconnected.

A quality phone system costs approximately \$1500 to \$2000. The systems are all digital and have very good sound quality, unlike an old answering machine with a tape player. You can further enhance your phone system by having a professional voice talent create your messages. I strongly recommend this. Also, be sure to use a female voice in your messages. Most of your clients will be female, so it only makes sense to have a female's voice on your system. A telephone call to your studio is, in many cases, the client's first contact with your studio, so do everything in your power to ensure that you create a good impression.

**Dress the Part.** If you want to achieve success in any kind of business, your appearance will definitely have an impact. I'm sure you have heard the

Don't overlook the importance of networking. Getting to know a few coaches can give you the inside track on winning sports photography contracts.



**YOUR STUDIO NEEDS TO  
PRESENT AN IMAGE THAT  
MAKES THEM WANT TO BUY.**

phrase “dress for success.” Yes, we can all cite examples of people who are making a good income while looking like a slob, but by and large, you are really impeding yourself by being sloppy about your appearance. Coming from thirty years in corporate America taught me a tremendous amount about success and failure. There are some things you just can’t teach to people, and maintaining a neat appearance is one of them. What are you saying about yourself and your business if you show up at your presentation before a sports board wearing jeans and a t-shirt?

**Speak as a Professional.** Carrying yourself in a professional manner is not optional. How you speak will have a tremendous impact on how much business you can attract. Of course, you must be friendly and respectful; you want people to like and relate to you. However, you should also speak in a manner that makes it clear that you take your work seriously and are a savvy professional; this helps inspire trust. Additionally, you should always remain positive and never speak negatively about a competitor. This will only make you seem petty.

**Keep a Professional-Looking Studio.** While team-sports clients may only visit it for retakes, maintaining a professional-looking studio enhances your overall image in the community. Creating this favorable impression will never be a drawback as you seek to win contracts from schools and leagues.

So, what kind of impression does your studio project? Does your business look good from the street? Is the front door clean and inviting? Is the sidewalk even and attractive, with landscaping and flowers leading to the entrance? Does the door have an expensive feel when you open it? All of these things may sound silly, but these perceptions send a message to the client about you and your business.

Naturally, your studio should also be clean and well maintained on the inside. Although this is just plain common sense, I have visited many studios that were cluttered and dirty. If you do not have the time or desire to keep your studio clean and professional, hire a cleaning service to come in at least once a week to do it for you. We are very fussy about the interior of our business. After each session, the dressing room carpet is vacuumed, and the mirrors are cleaned. There is simply no excuse for not keeping the interior of your business sparkling clean.

In the photography business, you are dealing (for the most part) with people who are spending discretionary income; they may want pictures, but they do not need them. As a result, your studio needs to present an image that makes them want to buy.

**Maintain Good Public Relations.** Good public relations are key to any business venture. Joining service organizations such as the local Rotary, Ki-



**NEWTON FALLS**



**FACING PAGE**—Sports props are always popular with the players. This one even features the school's name.

wanis, or Lions Club is something I would highly recommend. The contacts you will get in these organizations are invaluable. You will be doing your community a great service with your volunteer work at the same time as you are making yourself known to other business professionals—many of whom also volunteer as coaches. It's a win-win situation; nothing bad ever comes from doing something good for other people.

**Join Professional Organizations.** Acquiring sports league jobs can be a daunting task (we'll cover this process in chapter 5). In addition to developing good people skills and producing top-quality photography, you can set yourself apart from the competition by joining a few professional photography organizations.

Professional Photographers of America (PPA) and Wedding and Portrait Photographers International (WPPI) are just a couple of the national groups that exist to help photographers in their business and with their photography. Additionally, both groups offer certification and degree program for their members. Obtaining these rankings gives you another marketing tool to set you apart from many part-time (and even full-time) photographers.

There are also local and state organizations that meet monthly or quarterly, and these can be of great benefit to you. Networking with people in these organizations will be of tremendous benefit—after all, you can't live long enough to learn everything yourself! I personally have acquired many new great friends over the years by simply getting involved with professional photography organizations.

## **MASTER GOOD MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES**

Business management is a subject unto itself. All sorts of books, seminars, television programs, and magazines are dedicated to the field of business, and college degrees at all levels can be earned on the subject—it's that big and important a topic. Unfortunately, many of you will still breeze past this section and study the posing, lighting, and the equipment sections of this text! Nevertheless, I will present a focused approach to running a photography business.

**Manufacturer and Retailer.** Most people get into photography because they like to take beautiful pictures, not because they want to run a business. If you want to make a decent living in the photography business, though, it is imperative that you have skills in marketing and pricing. Running a photography business is very different from many other businesses. The main difference is that you are both a manufacturer and a retailer.

Walking through a mall, you see all types of stores selling just about everything you can imagine. In these businesses, the shop owners bought their

**IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A  
DECENT LIVING, IT IS IMPERATIVE  
THAT YOU HAVE SKILLS IN  
MARKETING AND PRICING.**





**FACING PAGE**—If you want to charge top dollar, you have to be able to deliver images that live up to your pricing.

goods at wholesale prices to sell at marked-up retail prices. Calculated into the price of the goods they are vending is the overhead, employee costs, insurance, rent, and anything else that is needed to run their business. All of these costs must fully be recovered before they even begin to make a profit! Many times the only difference between the products for sale in two different stores is the service level that's offered.

Operating a photography business offers all of these challenges, *plus* the challenge of manufacturing the product. You are not buying your pictures from a supplier wholesale and selling them retail, you are creating or manufacturing them! As a result, you have many more variables to calculate into the price of your product: cameras, lighting equipment, props, flash cards, computers, lab bills, and all of the other elements that go into creating your product. And don't forget to add in the value of your education—the amount of time and money you have spent learning photography.

**Get Smart About Pricing.** Given all of these variables, how in the world do you even begin to know what to charge? I'll tell you what most photographers do: they get their hands on a competitor's price list and simply charge a little less. Now that's a scientific way to calculate what to charge for your goods and services!

I once asked a photographer who was fairly new in the business how she determined her prices, and she said, "Oh, I just see what the lab charged me and multiply that number by three." If the lab was charging her \$3 for an 8x10-inch print, then she was going to charge the client \$9 for the picture—so the only cost she was figuring into her calculation was the lab bill! What about all of the other costs that went into producing that single print? Achieving a reasonable profit margin is not an easy task, but there are some basic things that must be considered to ensure profitability.

*Fixed and Variable Expenses.* There are two types of expenses in your business: fixed and variable. Fixed expenses are the same every month, regardless of your volume. Costs such as rent, insurance, basic phone service, and electricity are examples of fixed costs. Variable costs are associated with the amount of business you are actually doing. Things such as lab bills, wear and tear on equipment, the number of employees needed, frames, and photo mounts are all items that go into the variable cost column. Getting caught with high overhead and excessive labor costs will quickly lead to trouble. Keep your eyes on your expenses at all times.

*Percentage Profit.* So, given all we have just discussed, just what percentage of your gross should you be keeping? In my opinion, it should be in the 30- to 40-percent range. Anything over 40 percent means you have your operational costs well under control and are charging the prices you should. If

**JUST WHAT PERCENTAGE  
OF YOUR GROSS  
SHOULD YOU BE KEEPING?**



Success in team sports photography requires solid skills working outdoors with natural light and indoors with studio-light setups.

you are keeping less than 30 percent of your gross, you have a profit leak somewhere—maybe prices are not where they should be, your overhead is too high, you have too many employees, or there’s just not enough business.

If a lack of business is the issue, think long and hard before being tempted to lower your prices—this is a dangerous road to go down to acquire clients. If not enough clients are calling for appointments, there is generally another problem that you need to investigate. Are you offering high-quality portraiture, or do your pictures look like something your clients can get at a department store? Have you spent at least 10 percent of your yearly gross on high-quality mailings and other forms of advertising? This is not easy stuff! Just remember one thing: if you charge big bucks for your photography, you must deliver a product that seems worthy of this price.

**DO YOUR PICTURES LOOK LIKE**

**SOMETHING YOUR CLIENTS CAN GET**

**AT A DEPARTMENT STORE?**



**DEDICATED EMPLOYEES  
PAIRED WITH GOOD LEADERSHIP  
IS A WINNING COMBINATION  
FOR A GREAT ORGANIZATION.**

**Surround Yourself with Great Employees and Suppliers.** Anyone who runs a successful company of any size will tell you the main reason for their success is the people they have working for them. Dedicated employees paired with good leadership is a winning combination for a great organization. The smaller the company, the more important this is. If you have a staff of just three people and one of them is not pulling their weight, you are only running at two-thirds of your potential efficiency!

*Employees.* Finding an excellent employee can be difficult at best. I'm not a big fan of running an ad in the newspaper to find someone. In my opinion, the best route to finding good employees is via former clients. We have had a fairly good success rate hiring clients whom we thought would work well in our studio. You may also consider hiring someone part time and offering them a full-time position if they work out well. Many large corporations today hire a person as a contract employee and later hire them full time if they fit in well. Hiring a family member or a friend usually does not work out in the long term. I'm sure there are exceptions, but most of the time it simply causes problems.

When you find someone who is really performing, pay them well. Good employees are hard to find—particularly in the photography business. In a small studio operation, an employee needs to be excellent on the telephone, a good salesperson, organized, have some computer skills, a professional appearance, be pleasant all the time, and, of course, have superb people skills. If you can find someone who can do all this, you have a real winner!

Having great employees is really critical when it comes to sports-league and team photography. There is nothing you can do that will please everybody on a sports league board, but I can tell you one thing for certain: if you go to a big assignment and you are a little nervous or cranky and you have unpleasant help, your chances of ever photographing that league again is almost certainly zero! This should be a fun day for the kids. Most of them are looking forward to picture day and anxious about how they will look in their photographs. It is up to you and your staff to provide a happy, fun atmosphere for the kids and parents to enjoy. No matter how difficult a child is to photograph, no matter how nasty a parent can be, you and your staff must always smile and try to do what is right. Never argue with anyone on this type of job; you will only be digging yourself into a hole. If you or someone on your staff makes that one wrong person unhappy, you've destroyed your chances of being hired again next year.

*Suppliers.* In addition to having great employees to help run your operation, you also need some great suppliers. Your biggest supplier, of course, will be your photo finisher. Choosing a really good lab is not easy. There are

many issues to consider when deciding who is going to be printing all of your work. Some things to consider are quality, delivery times, prices, and customer service.

Try to find a lab that is well suited to your type of photography. Because we do so many types of photography, we need a lab that can print dances, sports jobs, high-school seniors, and wedding photography. Some studios choose to send different types of jobs to different labs. Personally, I find it much easier to send all of our work to one lab. You may spend a little more, but I find it less aggravating dealing with one lab rather than two or three.

When you find a good lab, stay with them. We have been in business over twenty years and have used only two labs. Our first lab serviced us for over fifteen years. The reason we switched was quite simple: when our previous lab started to grow and add to their facilities and employee roster, the quality of the work began to suffer. They were doing a very poor job of managing their growth. A good lab–studio partnership is like a good marriage: you both must have the same goals and standards.

While it might be tempting to hunt for a bargain, choosing a lab on price alone would be like a bride only considering pricing when choosing a wedding photographer—and we all know that’s not a good idea! Find a lab that truly has your success in mind. Work with your lab all the time to make the relationship better. You both will profit as you work together. For more on this, see chapter 9.

### **RUN THE BUSINESS, DON'T LET IT RUN YOU**

Many photographers I know—not all, but most of them—try to do most of the work in the studio themselves, under the illusion that it saves them money. Truth be known, there are probably a lot of studio owners who are not even making minimum wage when you factor in all of the hours they work. I once heard a speaker at a photography convention say, “Don’t spend your time doing \$6-an-hour work at your studio.” He was right; you should spend your time working on your next promotional



In addition to posed photographs of the teams and individual athletes, many team sports photographers are responsible for delivering game-action images. For more on this, see chapter 8.

## PHOTOGRAPHING SPORTS LEAGUES

### ACCURATELY AND EFFICIENCY

### IS SOMETHING THAT'S GOING TO

### TAKE TIME TO MASTER.

piece or making long-range marketing plans, not packaging a small job that you could be paying an employee to handle.

Don't get caught in the trap of long hours and no help. You will just burn yourself out, and your business will definitely be negatively impacted. It is extremely difficult to be creative if you are always under stress.

Operate your studio with normal business hours. We are open Monday through Friday from 10AM to 5:30PM. We are closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Although we have elected not to, I would recommend being open one evening a week until 8PM, and possibly on Saturdays until 2PM. If you want to close on a weekday, close on Friday, not Monday. You will get a lot more calls and business on a Monday than a Friday.

## START SMALL AND GROW GRADUALLY

Photographing sports leagues and high-school sports accurately and efficiently is something that's going to take time to master. There's no substitute for experience. The photography is only a small facet of the entire job. If you take on a big job before you have the skill and staff to handle it correctly, you may later find it difficult to acquire other jobs. Be fair with yourself; try to work for (or intern with) other studios before going out on your own. This type of photography is very competitive, and you want to get it all correct so the league will never have an excuse not to hire you next year.

Starting small will also give you a chance to see if you are capable of properly managing your cash flow. As you progress, you should be accumulating cash for future purchases and the expansion of your business. If you find that you don't like managing the business side of your studio, find someone who is experienced at small-business startups, and ask for their advice. Remember, without a solid business and marketing plan, you're headed for trouble.

Additionally, keep in mind that bigger is not always better. Several years ago, my wife and I looked at a building that was for sale on a main route in our community. It had approximately 4500 square feet and was only about twenty years old. The price was right, and the location was great. After the excitement of occupying a new building passed, though, I started thinking about how much more business we would have to do just to make the same profit we were making in our small, 1000-square-foot studio. To justify this additional space, we would have to hire another photographer, do more volume, and add additional support staff—just to perhaps make a little more income. We could have increased our gross sales by over \$100,000 and netted less profit!

We have all seen businesses—of many kinds—expand too far and too fast, only to be bankrupt in a few years. If you are in the wonderful position of

needing more room because your business is growing, control your volume with price. You can make more money and work less! Do not confuse gross income with profit; after all, keeping 35 percent of \$300,000 (\$105,000) is certainly better than keeping 20 percent of \$500,000 (\$100,000). And just think how much more work and help you would have to do to produce that additional \$200,000—all for just a \$5000 return!

## **SUCCESS LEAVES CLUES**

Why are some studios successful while others are just barely paying their lab account? Generally, success has little to do with “nice pictures.” Unfortunately, many photographers think that all they have to do to improve their business is take better pictures. There are others who confuse being busy with being successful; they think that if they are busy, they must be making money. I don’t know about you, but to me, success is measured not by how busy I am, but by how much money I am keeping (not just collecting).

Seek out the studios in your area that are doing well and compare them with the poorly performing studios. The differences will be extreme. So, just what are the success clues? Well, what is the décor of the studio like? How are the employees dressed? Are the printed materials attractive and well designed? Is the studio clean and well maintained? Some of the clues may take several months to discover, while others will be apparent as soon as you set foot in the studio. If you look carefully, you’ll find clues everywhere.

You’ll notice that these clues don’t have much to do with photography—they are much more fundamental concepts. In fact, most people I see doing well in this business would do well in any type of business venture; they simply know what building a successful business requires. Unfortunately, many studio owners do not and, therefore, they don’t see the real clues for success.

Only you know for sure if you have what it takes. Many photographers can take beautiful pictures but do a terrible job at marketing, dealing with

**MANY PHOTOGRAPHERS THINK  
THAT ALL THEY HAVE TO DO  
TO IMPROVE THEIR BUSINESS  
IS TAKE BETTER PICTURES.**

## **BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING**

Once you have photographed a couple of sports jobs, you will understand what I am talking about when I say: be prepared. A lot of being prepared is just common sense—things like having backup equipment and even backup help. Obviously, everything that *you* can control should be considered. You are going to have enough problems from the kids and parents without adding to your woes by forgetting to bring something or by neglecting to do something properly.

Success as a studio isn't just about taking pictures your clients love. It's about being a smart businessperson.



#### **RUN YOUR BUSINESS**

#### **AS IF EACH CUSTOMER WAS YOUR ONLY CUSTOMER.**

employees, caring for customers, etc. I truly believe that is why so many studios are not making a decent income. They get into this business because they like to take pictures and give no thought to all of the other elements involved.

Therefore, I encourage you to run your business as if each customer was your only customer. Do this right from the start. Have a master plan of what you expect or want from your business several years from now. Work the plan and plan to work. With a lot of desire and ambition, you can succeed.



## 2. EQUIPMENT SELECTION

### CAMERA SYSTEMS

It goes without saying that there are numerous digital cameras on the market today, and there are new ones entering the market almost every day. Therefore, I think it makes sense to buy the latest system available (working within your budget, of course). It may be tempting to buy a model that's been on the market for a while, just because the price is low. If you purchase the latest and greatest, at least you will own the camera for a couple of years before it becomes outdated. You may also get better color, more accurate flash exposures, and faster and more accurate focusing—which, in turn, means a better product for your customers and fewer problems for you.

**Ease of Handling and Weight.** Whatever brand you choose, look for a camera that feels right in your hand. For me, the weight issue is very important. Remember, you may be handholding the camera for several hours at a time, so you definitely want a camera that is as light as possible.

You should also check to be sure that holding the camera in either the horizontal or vertical position is very comfortable. You may even want to consider purchasing a vertical grip. This allows you to hold the camera in a vertical position and fire the camera from a second shutter release button that is in the same position as if the camera were being held horizontally. Many photographers find this option useful. Personally, I tend to shoot without it, mostly because I am trying to keep the weight of the camera to the absolute minimum.

**Write Speed.** Photographing sports leagues in any high school will almost certainly require that you photograph game action for the high-school yearbook. This requires that you have a camera that writes quickly to the memory card. Therefore, when selecting your camera, the write speed should be a major consideration.

**Dynamic Range.** As of this writing, no digital camera on the market has the latitude or range that film has (unless you shot everything in RAW mode). With film, you could get good photographs even if you overexposed

WHATEVER BRAND YOU CHOOSE,

LOOK FOR A CAMERA THAT

FEELS RIGHT IN YOUR HAND.

**YOU NEED TO HAVE A VERY**

**TIGHT EXPOSURE IF YOU**

**WANT TOP-QUALITY PICTURES.**

Throwing the background out of focus helps keep the viewer's attention on the subject.

the shot by four stops, or underexposed it by two stops. Overexpose a digital shot by four stops and you won't have a photograph. Underexposure is a little more forgiving on a digital camera, but you still need to have a very tight exposure if you want top-quality pictures.

## **LENSES**

On most digital cameras, the image sensor is smaller than a 35mm frame. Therefore, your lenses will all function as more telephoto than when used on a 35mm film camera. To better understand this, take a 35mm piece of film that shows an image of a person from head to toe. Place it on a white sheet of paper and place four pieces of masking tape so that they cover the top, bottom, right, and left of the image, leaving only about half of the image showing in the middle. The area that is still visible after you placed your tape on all four sides on the film is the size of the sensor in most digital cameras. As you can see, your subject has his feet and head cut off. To avoid this, you would have had to back up (get further away from your subject) when you took the picture. If you had a 50mm lens on a 35mm film camera, you would need to be approximately ten feet from the subject to get a full-length





photograph of him. Place that same lens on your 35mm digital camera (with a sensor half the size of film) and you would have to be approximately fifteen feet from the subject to get the same image. In essence, when you put a 50mm lens on a digital camera with a small sensor, you are changing the focal length of the lens to 75mm. (*Note: Personally, I work with Canon cameras. As of this writing, they are the only camera manufacturer to offer a full-frame digital sensor on a 35mm platform, meaning your lenses will have the same angle of view as on a 35mm film camera.*)

The down side of all this is that, because you have to get further away from your subjects, your backgrounds start to get sharper. Therefore, your subject has to compete for attention with the background. Another factor to consider is the effect of the increased working distance on your flash output. The only advantage of a smaller sensor is that your 200mm lens becomes a 300mm lens, which can be an advantage when shooting game action.

When photographing people, you should generally use the longest lens you can. This will flatter your subject's facial features and blur the background as much as possible, making your subject stand out in the photo-

This image, taken with a fisheye lens, was used for the fall football program. You must have a complete array of different lenses at your disposal, because you never know where the teams are going to want their pictures taken. This image would not have had the same impact if it had simply been taken with a wide-angle lens.



**YOU WILL ALSO RUN THE RISK OF  
GETTING DUST ON YOUR SENSOR  
EVERY TIME YOU SWITCH.**

With a good zoom lens, you can work in a wide variety of settings—from single portraits to group shots.

graph. Your outdoor pictures in particular will look better when the background is out of focus. Keep in mind that, while the shallow depth of field blurs the background, it also makes proper focus even more critical.

With teenagers, it is sometimes fun to break the rules and use a short lens to distort a basketball, football, band instrument, etc., that you have them hold out in front of them. You can create some pretty cool effects using this approach. You can even use a fisheye lens to create unique images—these will definitely ensure that your photographs look different from the ones most part-time shooters can offer.

Ultimately, when photographing any kind of league, speed is going to be an issue—you *must* stay on schedule. Therefore, I would actually recommend not changing lenses during the shoot. This means that your best lens choice will be a high-quality zoom. Don't skimp and buy a cheap, off-brand lens; it will cause you nothing but focus problems—especially when shooting digital. Personally, I use a 24–105mm red-line Canon lens on a Canon 5D body; if your camera has a smaller sensor, you'll want a lens in the 18–70mm range. This range gives you the wide angles you need for groups, along with the background compression and lack of facial distortion you want when zoomed



out to 105mm. (*Note:* Changing lenses on a sports job will not only slow you down, but you will also run the risk of getting dust on your sensor every time you switch.)

## CAMERA SUPPORTS

Whether or not you use a tripod for your team and individual portraits is up to you. If you decide to use a tripod, ensure that it is sturdy and easy to work with. You may need to adjust your camera height/position for each shot in order to get the right angle on the subject.

For action shots, most photographers handhold their cameras. However, some employ a monopod to help reduce camera shake. This is often useful in low-light situations and with long lenses—both common factors in sports action photography.

**FACING PAGE**—This soccer player knew exactly what he wanted to do when he came up to the camera. Taking this picture with a long lens at a large aperture blurred the background, making the subject stand out from the background. Never take individual sports photographs with a normal lens—your backgrounds will be sharp and your images will look generic. Note the catchlights in the subject's eyes. These were created with an on-camera flash unit set at about one stop less than the f-stop on the camera. Too much flash would have created a dark shadow under the subject's chin.



**LEFT**—If you're concerned about camera shake, consider adding a tripod to your packing list—but be prepared to adjust it to the height of each subject.









**FACING PAGE AND RIGHT**—Team sports assignments include photography of individual athletes (facing page), the whole team, and often smaller groups (right).



## **STOPPING TO RELOAD BATTERIES**

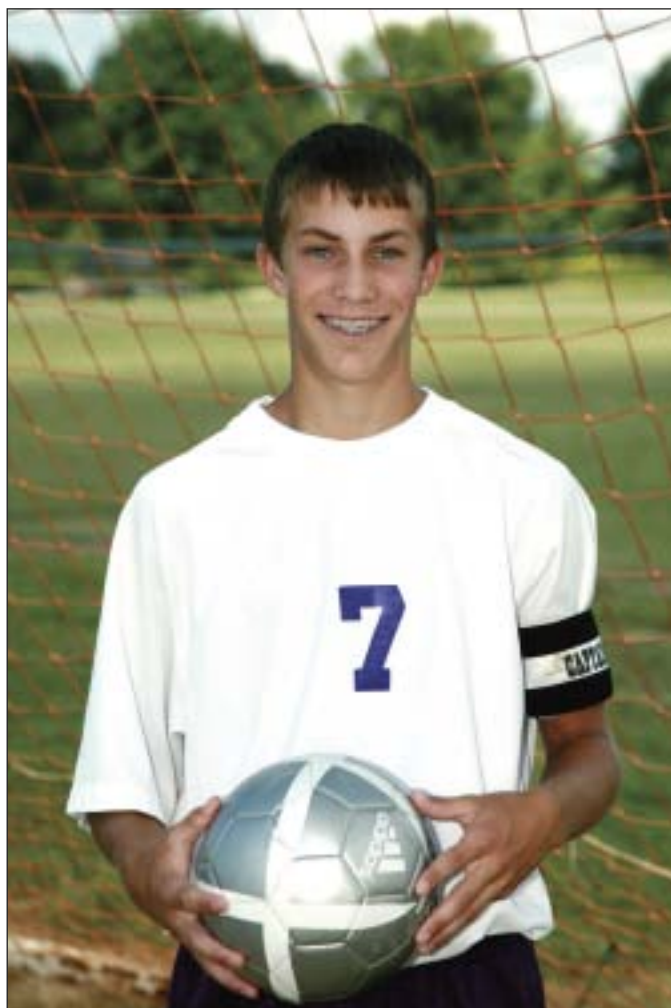
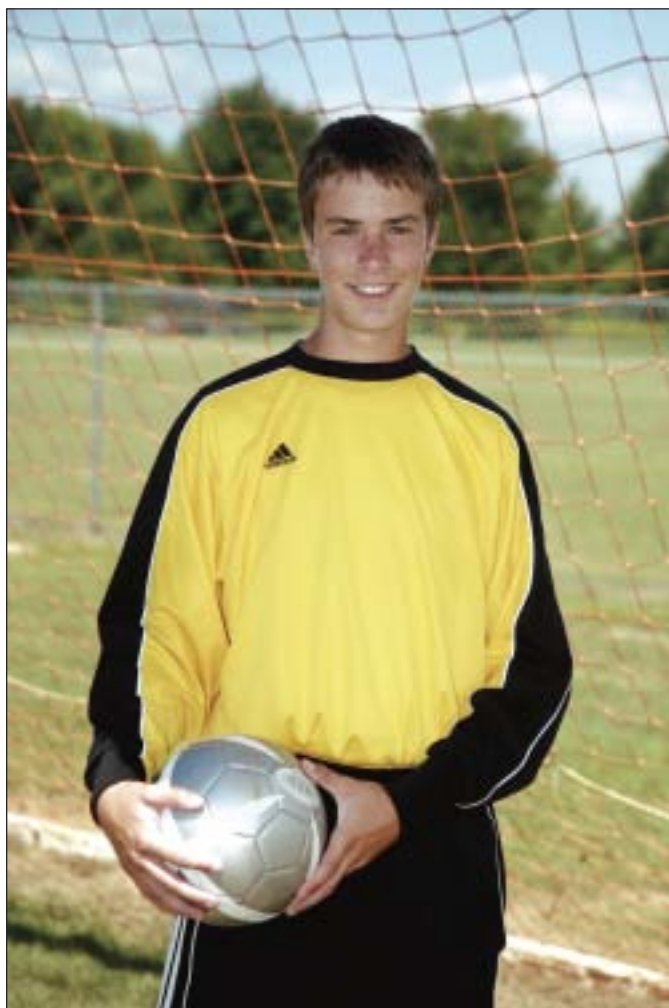
### **IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ASSIGNMENT**

#### **IS NOT A GOOD THING.**

#### **BATTERY LIFE**

Photographing a large sports league means staying on time or, even better, staying ahead of schedule. Stopping to reload batteries in the middle of an assignment is not a good thing. I recommend that you spend the extra money to buy lithium batteries. They last up to seven times longer than regular alkaline batteries and they also bring your flash up for the next shot much more quickly. Another option is to use an auxiliary battery, if one is available for your flash. The drawback is that you will be tethered to your flash unit.





## LIGHTING

**On-Camera Flash.** For indoor portraits, no on-camera flash can give you the lighting you get with an umbrella (see page 39). Therefore, when it comes to portraiture, on-camera flash is best reserved for outdoor portraits when more fill is needed than can be provided by a reflector or when you need to compensate for strong backlighting (covered in detail in chapter 6.)

For game-action photography, the only time you will probably use your flash is to provide a little extra light during night football games. High-school stadiums tend to be less well lit than those used in professional photography. You may also decide to use flash when photographing some indoor sports—but check with the league or school first; flash is sometimes prohibited by volleyball and basketball referees. When photographing indoor sports, I use a Gary Fong flash dome with the Canon 580 dedicated flash. This gives you great looking photographs with no shadows behind the subject.

**Portable Strobes.** If I am going to be photographing a series of individuals in the same location, I use portable strobes with umbrella lighting. These units produce a quality of lighting you simply can't achieve with portable

**ABOVE AND FACING PAGE—**On-camera flash is best reserved for outdoor shots where you just need an extra pop of light for fill or to compensate for strong backlighting.





flash. (*Note:* For some shoots, of course, this is impractical and you will have to stick to portable flash.)

There are many different manufacturers of studio lighting. I really can't tell you which ones to buy, but this much I *can* tell you: buy top-quality equipment and you will only have to buy it once. Look for units that have very accurate modeling lights so you can determine where the flash is going to go when you fire the camera. Be sure, too, that each of your lights has its own power pack; you want to be able to adjust each one individually without affecting the power of another light. Just like any other master craftsman, you must have the right tools and be proficient in their use in order to create beautiful work.

**LIKE ANY OTHER MASTER CRAFTSMAN,  
YOU MUST HAVE THE RIGHT TOOLS TO  
CREATE BEAUTIFUL WORK.**



Studio light provides a quality of illumination you just can't achieve with on-camera flash.

**THERE ARE ALMOST COUNTLESS  
LIGHT MODIFIERS AVAILABLE FOR  
PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY.**

**Light Modifiers.** There are almost countless light modifiers available for professional photography. The following are my choices, but your unique style and tastes may dictate different selections.

*Umbrellas.* Umbrellas are used to spread soft light over large areas, great for creating indoor portraits with a studio backdrop. They are black on the outside and either white or silver on the inside, with the silver-lined variety producing sharper light than the white ones. Umbrellas are usually used with a wide-angle reflector on the flash head, enabling you to better focus the beam of light. Umbrellas are very portable, making them ideal for location shoots.

*Honeycombs.* Honeycombs, also called grid spots, are metal grids that snap onto the perimeter of the light housing. They prevent the light from spreading out, producing a narrow beam of light with a diffused edge. This makes them good to use as hair lights, because they provide a great amount of control

*Louvers.* Louvers, also called barn doors, are black flaps that can be opened or closed to control the width of the beam of the light. These ensure that you light only the areas you want lit.

*Gobos.* A gobo is a device, usually black, that is used to block light. In outdoor photography, this can be used over the subject's head to block direct, overhead sunlight and prevent undereye shadows. On a cloudy day when the light is very flat, a gobo can be used to produce the shadows needed to create the appearance of a third dimension in your images.

*Reflectors.* Reflectors are devices used to bounce light onto a subject. In outdoor portraiture, these are commonly used as sources of fill light to reduce excessive contrast on the face. Reflectors come in white (for softer light) and silver (for sharper light). Gold reflectors are also available to add warmth to the light; personally, I've found these tend to make the skin tones look unnatural, though. Pop-out reflectors in a variety of sizes are widely available and easy to transport to your shoot.

### 3. PRODUCTS AND PACKAGES

**A**s I will discuss in the following chapters, before you can approach a school or league and hope to win a contract to photograph their team sports, you should have a complete line of products and packages to show them. You will also need to have worked out your pricing. Once you have won a contract, you must have detailed order forms and payment envelopes available.

#### PRODUCTS YOU WILL WANT TO OFFER

With today's technology, you can have a picture put on just about anything. Offering a large variety of these sports trinkets is the price you have to pay to even get consideration for a sports-league photography job. I should note,

Mugs and bag tags are just two of the specialized products you may want to offer your clients.





Banners can give little hitters a big-league feel.

however, that you will not actually sell a lot of these trinkets unless you include them in your packages (see below). We offer all of these items as an additional purchase to any package, and some packages have a few of the items included.

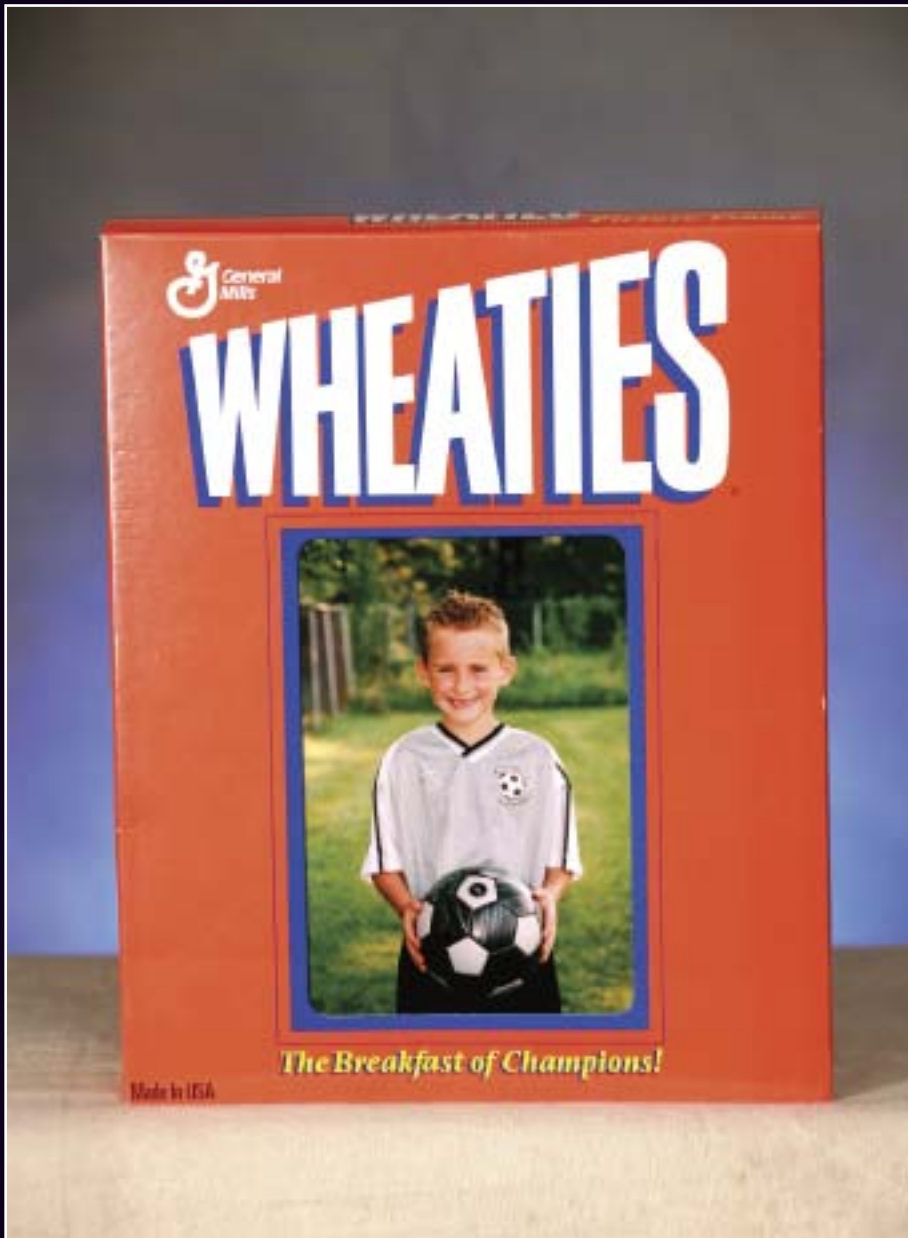
**Lab Products.** The first thing you will need to have is a good lab that offers a large variety of items in addition to prints. The lab we are currently using, The Image Place (see page 124), offers excellent photo quality, quick turn around, and a great selection of products. Of these, photo buttons are our biggest seller. Magazine covers and trading cards with the players' names are also a big hit with the kids. Bag tags, magnets, calendar magnets, and photo flashlights are some of the other items offered by The Image Place.

**Additional Products.** You will also need to supplement your lab's offerings with additional items bought from companies that specialize in these types of products. We use Neal Enterprise (see page 124) for our additional trinkets. These include items such as coffee mugs, mouse pads, trophies, plaques, bobble-head figures, and more.

**Franchise Deals.** Although I would not recommend it, there are franchised lab companies out there who do it all—they print your photographs and offer all of the sports trinkets. They also provide you with all of the forms, envelopes, and other materials that you need to fulfill a league contract. To use one of these companies, you must pay a franchising fee, which is based on the population of your town. From what I have seen, however, the print quality provided by these labs is not good—and you have to give them a percentage of your total income from each job! What these companies *can* do is make you look like a really big outfit with all of their form letters, trinkets,

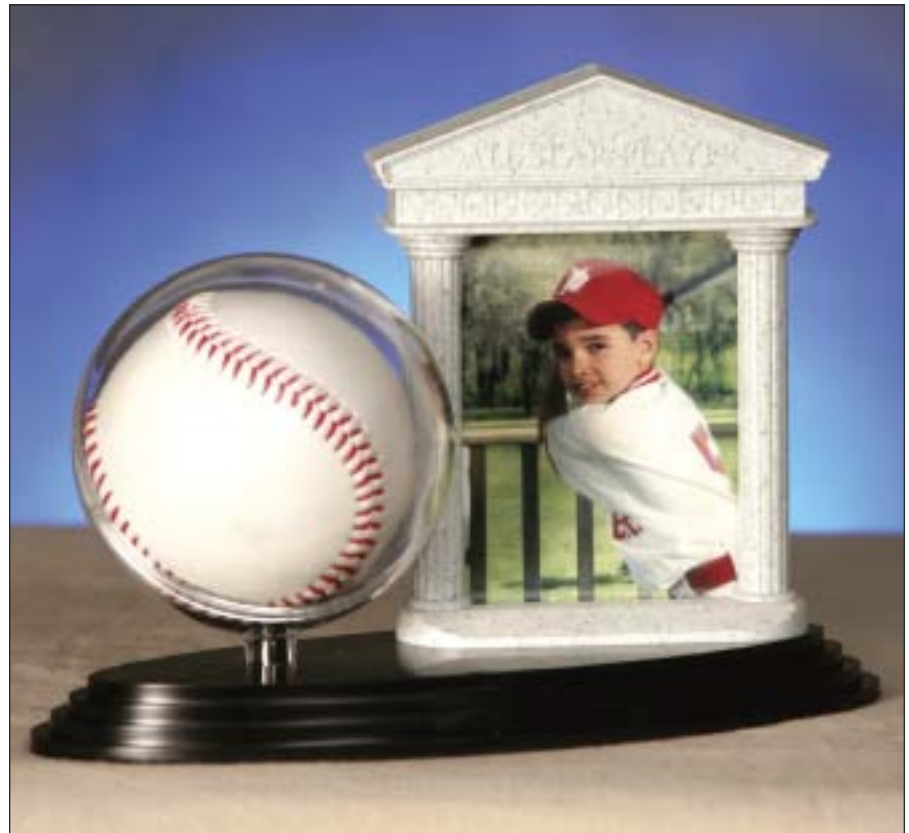
**YOU WILL NEED TO HAVE A GOOD LAB  
THAT OFFERS A LARGE VARIETY OF  
ITEMS IN ADDITION TO PRINTS.**







ABOVE, RIGHT, AND FACING PAGE—The variety of sports frames available is almost mind boggling!



**THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT  
ANYTHING GOES IN TRYING TO  
GET THIS TYPE OF WORK.**

color posters, and related materials. What they *can't* do is give you years of experience photographing sports leagues.

I think it's also worth noting how some of these companies go about winning business. One brochure I've seen, created for franchise photographers to give local league-board members, says in bold print across the top, "Before voting for the 'local guy' read this and vote on behalf of your parents and children." The brochure went on to suggest that, unlike the 'local guy,' the franchise photographer would have fun with the kids, fix their clothing and hair, and not be rude! Of course, there was no mention of references or years of experience doing this type of work.

The bottom line is that anything goes in trying to get this type of work. I was even told by a soccer-league president that he once had a local "photographer" give him samples of her work for consideration—and the president knew for a fact that she had not taken the photographs! Only you can decide what type of tactics you want to use. I'm not a big fan of getting jobs with smoke and mirrors; obtaining work dishonestly will certainly catch up with you sooner or later.

### **PACKAGES YOU WILL WANT TO OFFER**

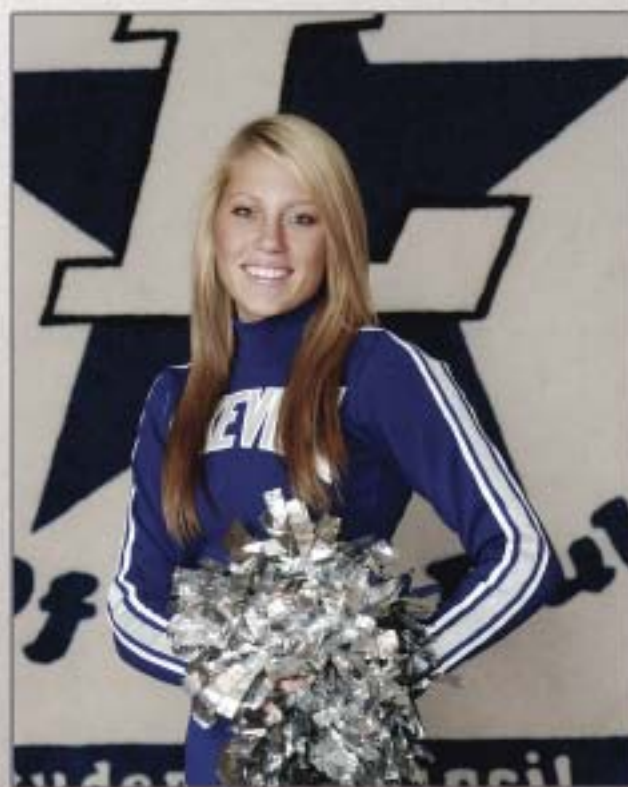
**Number and Price of Packages.** The number of packages you offer will be determined, to some degree, by the competition in your area. You're going



Alyssa Sarko

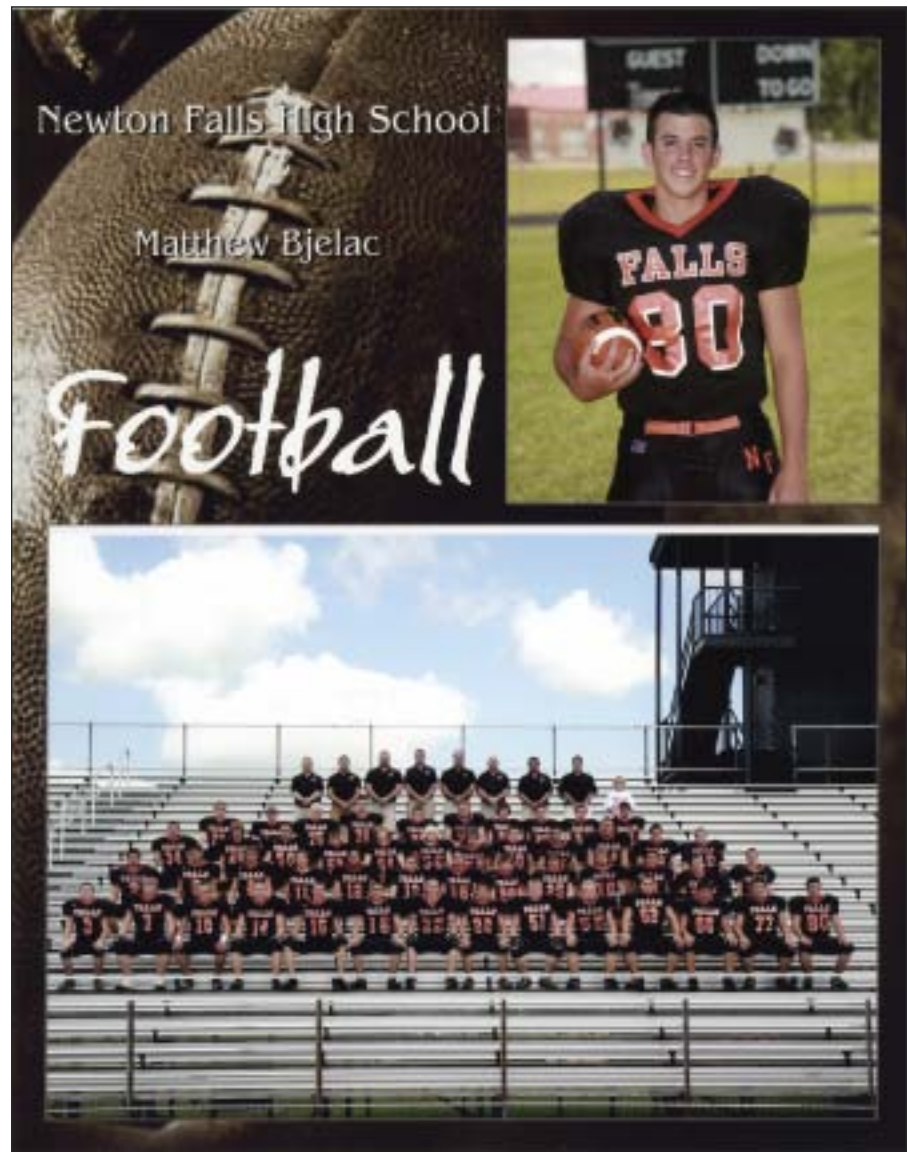
Lakeview High School

Cheer





**RIGHT AND FACING PAGE**—Since there is no mount, assembly time is decreased on a product like this. See page 46 for more on this.



to have to find out just what is being offered locally by other people doing the same kind of work. I would suggest that you offer no less than four package options at a variety of price points. Currently, we offer seven different packages, varying in cost from about \$15 to nearly \$60. The following list shows what is included on two of our top-selling packages. These packages can (and should) be adjusted to best suit your market, different sports, and even different types of clients.

**I SUGGEST YOU OFFER NO LESS**

**THAN FOUR PACKAGE OPTIONS**

**AT A VARIETY OF PRICE POINTS.**

**Package A (\$32)**


2- 5x7 individual print

1- 5x7 group print

Engraved mount

1- Photo button (individual image)

8- wallet photos



**James Williams Photography**  
 1101 Paradise Rd. • Warren, OH 44441  
 (330) 847-0807 • 1-800-925-3005  
 www.williamsphoto.com

Form # \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE PUT A (✓) IN THE BOX NEXT TO THE PACKAGE YOU WANT TO PURCHASE**

**PACKAGE A**  
 2-5 x 7 Individual  
 1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
 Engraved Mount  
 1 Photo Button Individual  
 8 Wallet Photos  
**\$32.00**

**PACKAGE B**  
*Best Value!*  
 2-5 x 7 Individual  
 1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
 Engraved Mount  
 1-8 x 10 Magazine Cover  
 2-3.5 x 5 Full-view Magnet  
 1 Photo Button Individual  
 16 Wallet Photos Individual  
**\$87.00**

**PACKAGE C**  
 1-5 x 7 Individual  
 1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
 Engraved Mount  
 1-3.5 x 5 Full-view Magnet  
 8 Wallet Photos Individual  
**\$28.00**

**PACKAGE D**  
 1-3 x 4 Individual  
 1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
 4 Wallet Photos  
**\$18.00**

**PACKAGE E**  
*Most Popular!*  
 1-3 x 4 Individual  
 1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
 1-8 x 10 Magazine Cover  
 1-3.5 x 5 Full-view Magnet  
 1 Photo Button Individual  
 8 Wallet Photos  
**\$42.00**

**PACKAGE F**  
 New and a Friend  
 2-5 x 7 1/2  
 and 4 wallet photos  
**\$17.00**

**PACKAGE G**  
 1-5 x 4 Individual  
 1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
**\$18.00**

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS (circle items)**

	with any package per photo	with NO package per photo
(H) 2-8 x 10's of Individual	19.00	25.00
(I) 1-8 x 10 of Individual	11.00	15.00
(J) 2-5 x 7's of Individual	10.00	15.00
(K) 16 Wallet Photos of Individual	14.00	22.00
(L) 8 Wallet Photos of Individual	8.00	13.00
(M) 1-8 x 10 Magnet on Cover	13.00	17.00
(N) 16 Sports / Band Trading Cards	25.00	33.00
(O) 8 Sports / Band Trading Cards	14.00	20.00
(P) 1-3.5 x 5 full-view Photo Magnet of Individual	6.00	9.00
(Q) 1-2.5 x 3.5 Keychain of Individual	6.00	12.00
(R) 1-Photo Buttons of Individual Only	5.00	7.00
(S) 1-Photo Buttons with Filigree	7.00	7.00
(T) 1-Light up Keychain of Individual	12.00	16.00
(U) 1-2.5 x 5 Photo Calendar Magnet of Individual	6.00	9.00
(V) 1-Photo Bag Tag of Individual	3.00	10.00

**ADDITIONAL GROUP PHOTOS AVAILABLE ON REVERSE SIDE**

**Thank You!**

Exact change please; change will not be given on picture day. Make checks payable to: Williams Photography

**ADDITIONAL GROUP PICTURES**

1-8 x 10 - \$12.00 • 1-5 x 7 - \$9.00

Group	Size	Qty.	Price
Team			
Cheerleading Squad			
Band			
Band Sections			
Band Officers			
Flagline			
Majorettes			
<b>TOTAL \$</b>			

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_ Team/Group \_\_\_\_\_

### Package B (\$57) "Best Value"

- 2- 5x7 individual prints
- 1- 5x7 group prints
- Engraved mount
- 1- 8x10 magazine cover
- 2- 3.5x5 full-view magnet
- 1- Photo button (individual image)
- 16- Wallet prints (individual image)

This product combines the order form and envelope into one. For another option, see pages 48–49.

**Base Package.** You will also need one very low-priced package to offer your players. At our studio, this consists of one 4x5 individual print and one 5x7 team photo. This package is what I call your loss leader; hopefully, not many of these will be purchased, but they help ensure that every player on the team will place an order of some kind. In accordance with the price, this package should be very easy to deliver. You may simply give the player their prints in a bag with no kind of photo mount. Alternately, you can place the shots in a plain (or engraved) photo mount. If you are dealing with a digital

lab that offers this product, you can have both shots merged onto one 8x10 sheet. The team photo is placed across the bottom and the individual picture is in the top right corner. To the left of the individual photograph, you can have the lab add a logo (for the sport that the player is in—or your own logo, if you like) and the player’s name.

**BE SURE TO OFFER A PACKAGE THAT  
ALLOWS THE ATHLETE TO HAVE THEIR  
PICTURE TAKEN WITH A FRIEND.**

**Buddy Package.** Be sure to offer a “buddy package,” a selection that allows the athlete to have their picture taken with a friend and get two 5x7 prints for a set price. Many parents also use this selection when they want



We offer a popular buddy package. Having your picture taken with your friends is always fun.





photographs taken of siblings. Adding this selection gives your players the opportunity to purchase some unique products while increasing your profits.

**Additional Items.** Beneath the set packages, we list a wide variety of additional items that can be ordered with photos of the individual athlete. These include extra prints and a number of photo novelties at a variety of price points. We offer these at a lower price if they are ordered in addition to a package. Additional group portraits are also offered.

**ABOVE**—Buddy packages are popular with kids of all ages. **BELOW AND FACING PAGE**—An easy-to-read order envelope (below) and order form (facing page, top) are critical. The back of the order form (facing page, bottom) showcases some of our novelty items.

*Remember, all team members will be photographed for the team photo, but only those with payment will be photographed for a package or additional items.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Please enter the quantity of each package you would like to order and enter the total dollar amount due to the right. Thank You!

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Full amount must be enclosed.*

*James Williams Photography • 1131 Peoria Rd. • Warren, OH 44481 • (330) 317-0027 • 1-800-926-8005*

**Studio Use Only**

Bill \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Photographer \_\_\_\_\_



A variety of popular packages have been designed for you! These packages offer the greatest savings. However if these packages do not satisfy your particular needs, you may design your own combinations by ordering from our "ADDITIONAL ITEMS" price list. You may also like to add a few of the novelty items such as Photo Buttons and Magnets, Wallets, Magazine Covers and Keychains, to name a few from the "ADDITIONAL ITEMS" price list.

**Most Popular! PACKAGE A**  
1-4 x 5 Individual  
1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
Engraved Mouse  
1-8 x 10 Magazine Cover  
1-4 x 6 full view Magnet  
8 "MVP" Trading Cards  
8-Wallet Photos  
**\$39.00**

**PACKAGE B**  
1-5 x 7 Individual  
1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
Engraved Mouse **\$18.00**  
1-4 x 6 full view Magnet  
8-Wallet Photos Individual

**PACKAGE C**  
1-4 x 5 Individual  
1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
Engraved Mouse  
**\$13.00**

**ADDITIONAL ITEM N**  
8-Wallets in addition to  
Packages **\$7.00**

**ADDITIONAL ITEM O**  
16-Wallets in addition to  
Packages **\$13.00**

**PACKAGE D**  
1-5 x 7 Individual  
1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
Engraved Mouse  
8 "MVP" Trading Cards  
1-5 x 7 Photo Individual  
8-Wallet Photos  
**\$29.50**

**Best Value! PACKAGE E**  
2-5 x 7's Individual  
1-5 x 7 Group Photo **\$53.50**  
Engraved Mouse  
1-8 x 10 Magazine Cover  
2-4 x 6 full view Magnet  
16 "MVP" Trading Cards  
8-Wallet Photos Individual

**PACKAGE G**  
1-4 x 5 Individual  
1-5 x 7 Group Photo  
Engraved Mouse  
1-8 x 10 Magazine Cover  
2-4 x 6 full view Magnet  
16 "MVP" Trading Cards  
8-Wallet Photos Individual

#### ADDITIONAL ITEMS

- (I) 8 x 10 of Individual.....
- (J) "MVP" Trading Cards (16).....
- (K) 3" Photo Button of Individual.....
- (L) 8 x 10 "MVP" Magazine Cover.....
- (M) 2-5 x 7's of Individual.....
- (N) 8-Wallet Photos of Individual.....
- (O) 16-Wallet Photos of Individual.....
- (P) 5 x 7 Group Photo.....
- (Q) One Sports Pennant with Individual & Team Photo.....
- (R) 3-1/2 x 5 Full View Photo Magnet of Individual.....
- (S) 2-1/2 x 3-1/2 Keychain with photos on each side of Indiv.....
- (T) Sports Ball Trophy.....
- (U) Sports Mouse Pad.....
- (V) 11 oz. Snap Mug.....
- (W) Sports Jersey Frame.....
- (X) Wheaties Box Frame.....
- (Y) Photo Sports Soccerball.....
- (Z) Soccerball Bobble Head.....

**Special  
Items  
T-Z**

\*Remember to order enough photographs for friends and relatives.  
\*Please fill out attached envelope and return it on picture day.  
\*Exact change please, change will not be given on picture day.  
\*Make checks payable to: Williams Photography  
\*Pictures will be delivered in approximately 3 weeks.

see reverse side for Special Items T - Z!

## Special Items This Season For Your All Star Player!



Item T - Sports Ball Trophy



Item U - Sports Mouse Pad



Item V - Snap Mug



Item W - Soccer Jersey Frame



Item X - Wheaties Box Frame



Item Y - Photo Sports Soccer Ball



Item Z - Soccer Bobble Heads

# 4. SCHOOL SPORTS

## HOW TO GET AN ASSIGNMENT IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM

Photographing school sports teams can be very lucrative if done properly. In this section I will discuss what kind of agreements you can expect to acquire.

**Who Decides.** Having the right contact is key to even having a chance at getting the job. The first thing you will have to find out is just who is in charge of the photography for all of the school sports. Every school handles it differently and has different people in charge of getting a photographer. It may be the athletic director, yearbook advisor, the principal, or the board of education. It may be someone who is not even employed by the school system, such as a booster-club parent. Now for the best part: it may be a combination of all of them!

With that said, I absolutely believe that the yearbook advisor should be in charge of choosing the photographer for a school. The *last* person who should be in charge is a booster-club parent. At the schools we service where the yearbook advisor is in charge, everything runs very smoothly and the school gets a better yearbook. When a booster-club parent is in charge of the photography, they almost never have a complete understanding of what is needed to produce an outstanding yearbook. In fact, most of them don't even know that the team photographs will be used in the yearbook. Over the past years, every problem we have had with scheduling a photography assignment has involved a booster-club parent.

Last year, for example, we had a booster-club mother hire a studio for the same basketball photos that the school had hired us to do. We still photographed about half the players and all of the cheerleaders—but *everyone* was told to come to our picture day for the yearbook's team photograph. In other words, the competing studio was to make all the profit, and we were to photograph the team for the yearbook! Of course, there was also no mention of who was going to be photographing the game action for the yearbook advisor. The booster-club mother simply hired the other studio because they were cheaper. She had no knowledge that we were providing game-action

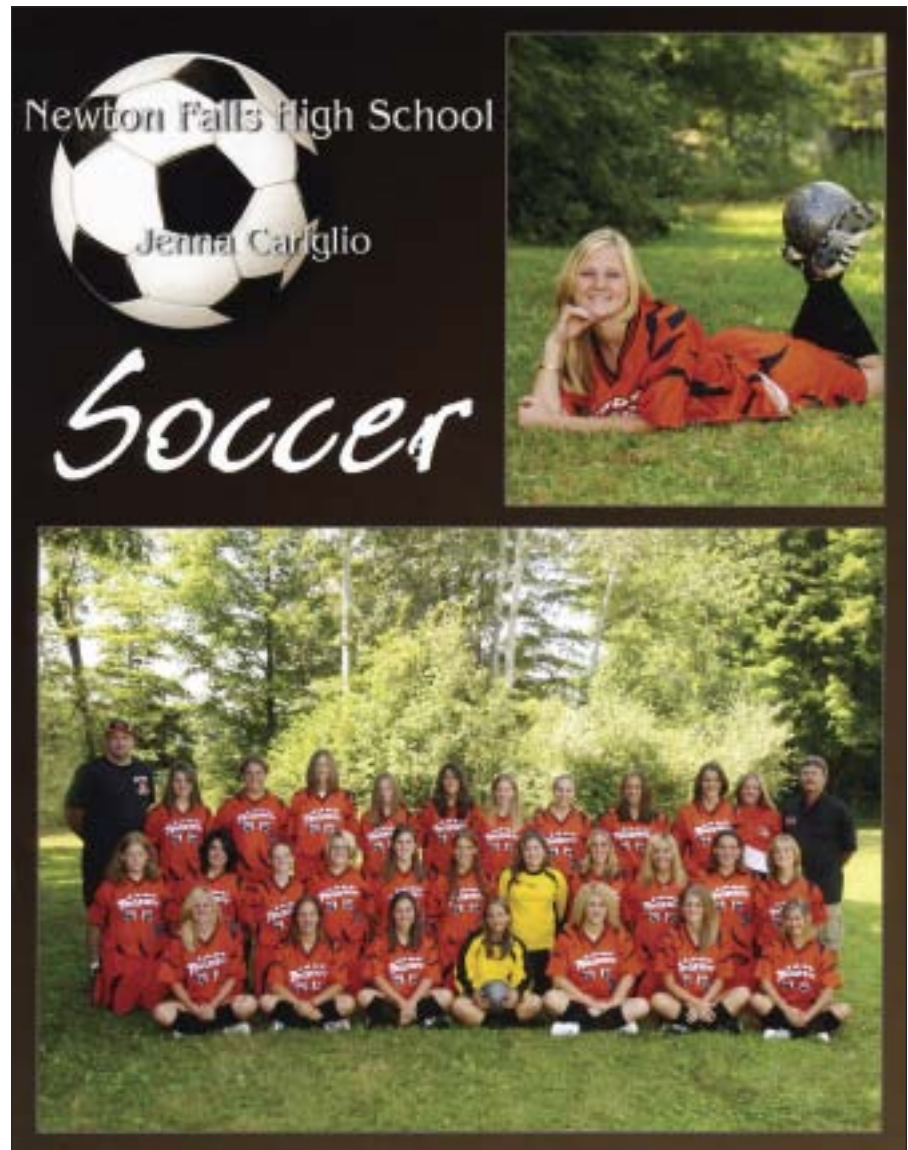
HAVING THE RIGHT CONTACT

IS KEY TO EVEN HAVING A CHANCE

AT GETTING THE JOB.



Soccer is an increasingly popular sport for both boys and girls.



photos to the school; she was only concerned with her team and her deal with the other studio. I'm certain she was not trying to create problems, but the bottom line was that all the players got conflicting information about who was doing the photography and when it was going to be done. Having too many people in charge of anything creates chaos.

**HAVING TOO MANY PEOPLE**

**IN CHARGE OF ANYTHING**

**CREATES CHAOS.**

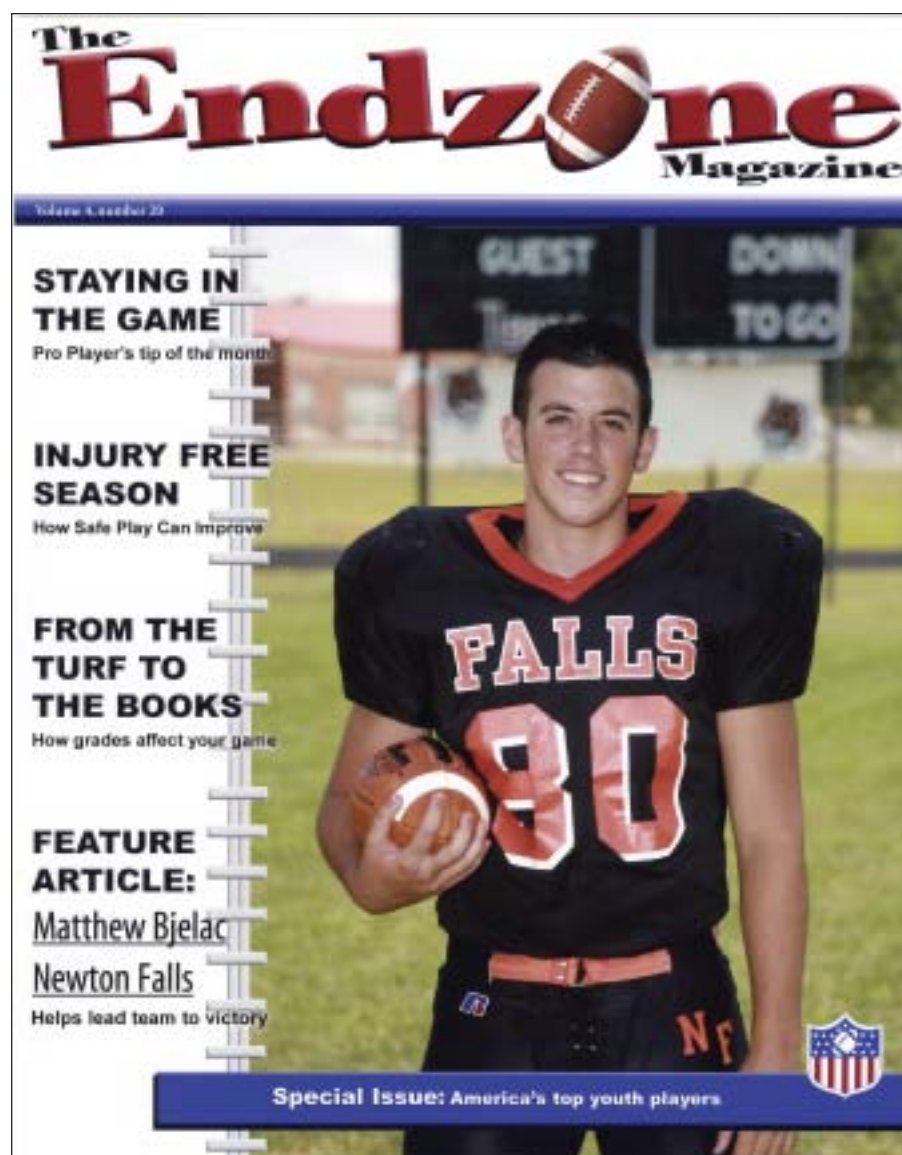
The only way to determine who to contact about getting hired is to call the school and ask the secretary who is in charge of sports photography. If she does not know, ask her to connect you with the athletic director.

**How to Apply for the Job.** Once you've found out who to talk to, there is still no uniform way to apply for any of these jobs. Many photographers get hired because they know someone, sometimes the person in charge of hiring a sports photographer will call local studios for quotes. Other times, you may be called upon to give a presentation. Basically, you need to be prepared—there's no way to tell exactly how the decision will be made!

**When to Look for Jobs.** It has been my experience that most schools have a photographer hired for fall sports before school is out in May or June. Check with the school you would like to get into *before* school is out for the summer and ask them if they are looking for a new photographer for their sports. If a school has been experiencing poor service from their current photographer, you may get lucky and get a chance to talk to someone about getting the contract.

**Contracts.** The contract between a photography studio and a high school determines what the photographer is expected to do—and this may include much more than sports photography. For example, you might be asked to provide the school's extracurricular club photographs for free in exchange for the opportunity to photograph the sports and band packages (the part of the job that gets you paid). In addition, you may be given the lucrative job of photographing the prom and homecoming dances.

**CHECK WITH THE SCHOOL YOU WOULD  
LIKE TO GET INTO BEFORE SCHOOL  
IS OUT FOR THE SUMMER.**



Another product you can offer the athletes you photograph is a mock magazine cover, created using a simple template (so there's no custom work needed).

**DON'T ALLOW YOUR EAGERNESS  
TO GET THE JOB OVERCOME  
YOUR GOOD BUSINESS SENSE.**

These contracts vary greatly from school to school—both in terms of what you are expected to do and what you will get in return. Before you agree to service the school, you should sit down with the person in charge and make sure you understand the terms of the contract. Don't allow your eagerness to get the job overcome your good business sense. It's unbelievable how far some studios go to get (or keep) a job at a school system. I've heard stories of schools demanding cameras, rolls and rolls of film (before digital came into vogue), print processing, and lots of unpaid time at the school to photograph clubs and organizations. We were once hired by a high school to do the individual sports packages and all the game-action images for sporting events. We had to photograph all of the clubs and organizations for the yearbook, as well. The job of photographing the school's two dances, a much more profitable assignment, was being handled by another studio, whose responsibility it was to show up one night, photograph the dance, count the money, and deliver the pictures three weeks later. We, on the other hand, had to constantly haul our equipment to the school to photograph various groups and events.

Only you can determine if the "freebies" (and time) are worth it. Your gross sales should be the determining factor in your decision—and, again, don't confuse being busy with making money. Photographers are famous for telling everyone how busy they are, but often they don't have anything in their bank account to show for it. For more on this, see chapter 1.

Most of the contracts we have acquired over the years have been the result of poor service from previous studios. This type of photography is also very political, another reason one studio gets picked over another. For example, my brother, who operates a studio about 75 miles south of ours, lost a school contract one year because the yearbook advisor started dating his competitor. My brother's chance of keeping that school contract was slim to none—and slim just left town!

### **WHO'S YOUR BOSS?**

Your boss may be the yearbook advisor, the athletic director, a booster-club parent, the principal, the school board, or a combination of all of them. In my experience, it's best if you can work with the yearbook advisor, since they will be the end user for many of the photographs.

Service is the key word when dealing with the advisors. They have one of the most difficult extracurricular activities in the school; every year, they must deal with the yearbook publisher, a new crop of students, the photographer, teachers, and school administration—and, to top it all off, they must sell ads to help pay for the yearbook. For them, it is a year-long process, with very



little extra pay. By the time the yearbook comes, it's time to start the whole process over again. Needless to say, with all of this pressure, the last thing they need is a photographer who delivers excuses instead of service. If you can make their job easier, however, they will be on your side.

**BELOW AND FACING PAGE**—Band pictures are always a part of sports photography in the fall at our area high schools—and don't forget the color guard!







## THE SHOOT

When photographing high-school sports, the athletic director, yearbook advisor, or a booster-club member will typically set up a day for you to photograph all of the sports teams and the band. Starting in August, a few weeks before school begins, we photograph all of the fall sports and the band. Fall sports consist of football, volleyball, soccer, cheerleading, band, choir, and (at some schools) tennis and swim teams.

The members of each group are usually photographed at different locations, both indoors and outdoors, around the school. This makes it difficult to have a studio lighting setup for everyone. Students today are looking for something different and unique, so photographing everyone at the same location is not usually an option. Because you are going to be in so many different lighting situations on these types of assignments, you absolutely must have complete understanding of ambient light, flash, and studio lighting. These types of jobs are not for beginners.

**Before the Shoot.** Your job as a team sports photographer actually begins before the day of the shoot. Let's assume that you are going to photograph the sports teams and band for a local high school. At least two weeks before the assignment, you'll need to deliver the purchase envelopes and prices to the school (for samples, see chapter 3). This gives the coaches, band directors, and other personnel plenty of time to pass them out to the students.

Visiting the site a few days before the assignment will also save you a lot of grief. First, you will need to find out what door to go in (front, back side, etc.). Many schools today have strict security policies, so you may need to make arrangements to be admitted. You and your staff may also need to check in at the office or with the security staff when you arrive. You should also make sure that you have a phone number to call in case the building is locked when you arrive on the day of the shoot (or if the person who was supposed to let you in doesn't show up). Even if it's because someone else was late to unlock the doors, you will be the one who looks bad if you are running late all day.

Next, you'll need to determine the shooting areas you will use. If you are photographing a high-school band or choir, you will usually be in the gym or on the stage in the auditorium. You are, of course, going to need another area to photograph the teams and individual athletes. To photograph full-length portraits of individuals (with an 85mm lens), I would suggest using an area that is at least 30 feet long and 20 feet wide. To photograph the teams (with a 50mm lens), you will need an area that is about 20 feet long by 30 feet wide. You may also need to bring a large backdrop, depending on where you are set up.

**VISITING THE SITE A FEW DAYS**

**BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT WILL ALSO**

**SAVE YOU A LOT OF GRIEF.**



## MAKE A CHECKLIST

Make a checklist and go over every detail. Being organized and professional (and having everything go well) will pay dividends later. Below are most of the items you will want to have with you. If all of your photography is going to be outside, then you will not need to pack the studio strobes, background, and poles.

Two camera bodies	Lighting umbrellas
Two portable strobes	Flash meter
Two zoom lenses	Duct tape
Two lens hoods	Tripod
Batteries	Background poles and background
Flash cards	Extra ordering envelopes
Extension cords	Two-prong plug adapters
Light stands	Pens
Studio strobes	Clipboard

Once you've decided where you plan to shoot, you need to determine where the outlets are located. (This is especially important if you plan to use any studio lighting, but a full-day shoot may also require power to run laptops for backing up images, or just to recharge one set of batteries while you are shooting with another.) Sometimes it is necessary to have a janitor turn on a switch somewhere to make an outlet work. Check to see if the outlets are grounded; if not, be sure to pack adapters for the shoot. You should also determine how many extension cords you will need.

**The Day of the Shoot.** Arrive approximately ninety minutes before the start time. Some students come early; if you are ready early, too, it means you will have fewer students waiting in a line throughout the day. As you set up for the shoot, keep the traffic flow in mind. Set up your background and lights so the students are not walking around in areas where they could trip or knock over your equipment. Safety should be a major concern on all location shoots.

Because they are common to both high-school and league sport photography, the lighting and posing techniques required to create top-quality images are covered in chapters 6 and 7.

For most sports assignments I take along one person. Be sure to have someone who is friendly, organized, and experienced. Do not take a rookie on a big job. This person's job is to make sure each player's order envelope is filled out properly, then to record the camera frame number on the enve-

**AS YOU SET UP  
FOR THE SHOOT, KEEP THE  
TRAFFIC FLOW IN MIND.**

lope as we take that player's picture. Many times, a player wants pictures with a friend and has the money for the extra picture in their friend's envelope. This can get confusing, and your helper will be in charge of keeping it all straight. (*Note:* Be sure to alert your helper when you have to take more than one picture of a subject due to a blink, blowing hair, poor expression, etc. If you don't, your frame numbers and envelopes won't match up—a recipe for disaster!)

When shooting sports jobs, working in the JPEG format is the only way to go. Processing the RAW images from a sports job would add hours of time to your workflow—not to mention a huge amount of storage space on your computer. So get the exposure correct, and stick to the JPEG setting.

Should you backup your files during the shoot? The choice is yours. We choose not to backup our images after the session. I would much rather have a large flash card (1GB or 2GB) in the camera and leave it untouched during the entire assignment. In my opinion, the less you have to fool with the recording device, the better. If you do decide to backup your images, you may need to add a laptop, power cord, and card reader to your packing list for the shoot.

### **SCHEDULE A RETAKE DAY**

I would recommend scheduling a picture retake day no later than three weeks after everyone else has received their photographs. There are going to be some players who miss picture day and therefore require a retake. Images with closed eyes, poor expressions, or messy hair are another reason for retakes. Of course, these should be very minimal if you are careful on the day of the shoot—especially if you shoot digital and can check each shot before the subject leaves the set. We always have many more people who simply were not photographed than retakes due to errors or unsatisfied clients.

If you have a studio close to the community where the original session was photographed, I recommend having the players come to your studio for retakes. This gives the parents and players more flexibility in scheduling their retakes (and gives you an excellent opportunity to have new people visit your studio). Offering a retake day at

Service is critical in this business. That's why we offer our clients a satisfaction guarantee.





Starting in August, a few weeks before school begins, we photograph all of the fall sports—including football.



their convenience instead of yours may just give you an edge in getting the contract again next year. Remember: service is the main ingredient for success in this business.

### **ADDITIONAL SERVICES THAT MAY BE EXPECTED**

At most schools, getting a contract to photograph the sports teams will also involve photographing other types of images. This will vary widely from school to school, but the following are common.

**Photographing Game Action.** As we all know, a high-school yearbook is made up mostly of photographs from the past school year's activities. This means that the yearbook advisor needs outstanding photographs of all the organizations, clubs, teams, etc. The most difficult photographs to take for the yearbook are game-action shots for all the sports played throughout the school year. A high-school student (or even an advanced amateur photographer) is simply not going to have the skills or equipment to do a stellar job with these photographs. Therefore, at high schools where we are doing all of the team photography for profit, we also offer game-action pictures for the



yearbook advisor. This service is optional at some schools and mandatory at others. We'll cover this topic in more detail in chapter 8.

**Photographing Clubs and Organizations.** Yearbook advisors will also want you to photograph all the clubs and organizations at the school. Being prompt is imperative; the advisors will have schedules for each club and organization throughout the day. I know of a photographer who was scheduled to show up at a local airport to photograph the high-school senior class in front of an airplane. The school bused all of the seniors to the airport only to find that the photographer did not show up for the shoot. (And, no, he didn't have an accident on the way to the job.) Needless to say, he no longer has the contract for that high school. Photographing the groups in different settings always looks better than just placing them in the high-school gym bleachers. Of course, this will ultimately be the decision of the advisor.

**Photographing School Dances.**

The chance to photograph proms, homecomings, and winter dances is usually a perk of the contract to shoot the sports and yearbook photographs for a school. Don't let a school take advantage of you by expecting you to photograph all the game action (because you are photographing all the teams) and then hiring a different studio to photograph the more profitable school dances. In my area, we currently have only one school for which we are not photographing the dances. In this case, the individual and team portrait packages generate enough income to make it worth our time.

To run a smooth operation at a school dance requires a great deal of organization. I strongly recommend starting out with small dances before you move on to a job with over 100 couples. Without experience, you are asking



A neutral background is often a good choice, because you know it will match most of the girls' dresses.

for trouble. There are many ways that dances are handled by photographers. I will tell you what has worked well for us over the many years we have photographed these events.

*Planning.* When a dance is booked for your studio, the first thing you want to find out is how many couples will be in attendance. This will determine how many assistants you need and the number of background setups you will require. If 25 or fewer couples are attending the dance, you can handle the posing, taking photographs, and giving change on your own. For 25 to 75 couples, I recommend that you utilize an assistant to give change and direct the couples. When we have a dance with over 200 couples, we have up to seven people working to keep things moving so the students do not have

The number of couples attending the dance will determine how many people you will need to staff the shoot.

to wait in line any longer than twenty minutes. Be sure to bring plenty of change—dollar bills and fives (for the bigger dances, you'll need at least a few hundred dollars worth).

A dance with 200 to 250 couples can be serviced with one background and one photographer, providing you have enough help working the dance along with you. When photographing dances with more than 250 couples, you will probably need an additional background. The thing to remember here is that it's not how many backgrounds you have set up but how efficiently you can photograph the students. With a good crew, we can photograph a couple about every twenty to thirty seconds.

*Background Selection.* Find out the theme of the dance, as this will give you some idea of what type and color background will be most appropriate. We try to use colors that will look good with any color of dress that the girls may wear. Light grays, tans, and other soft colors always look good; bright colors generally do not. Select a background that creates depth. For



full-length couple shots, you will need a background that is 10 feet wide by 15 feet long.

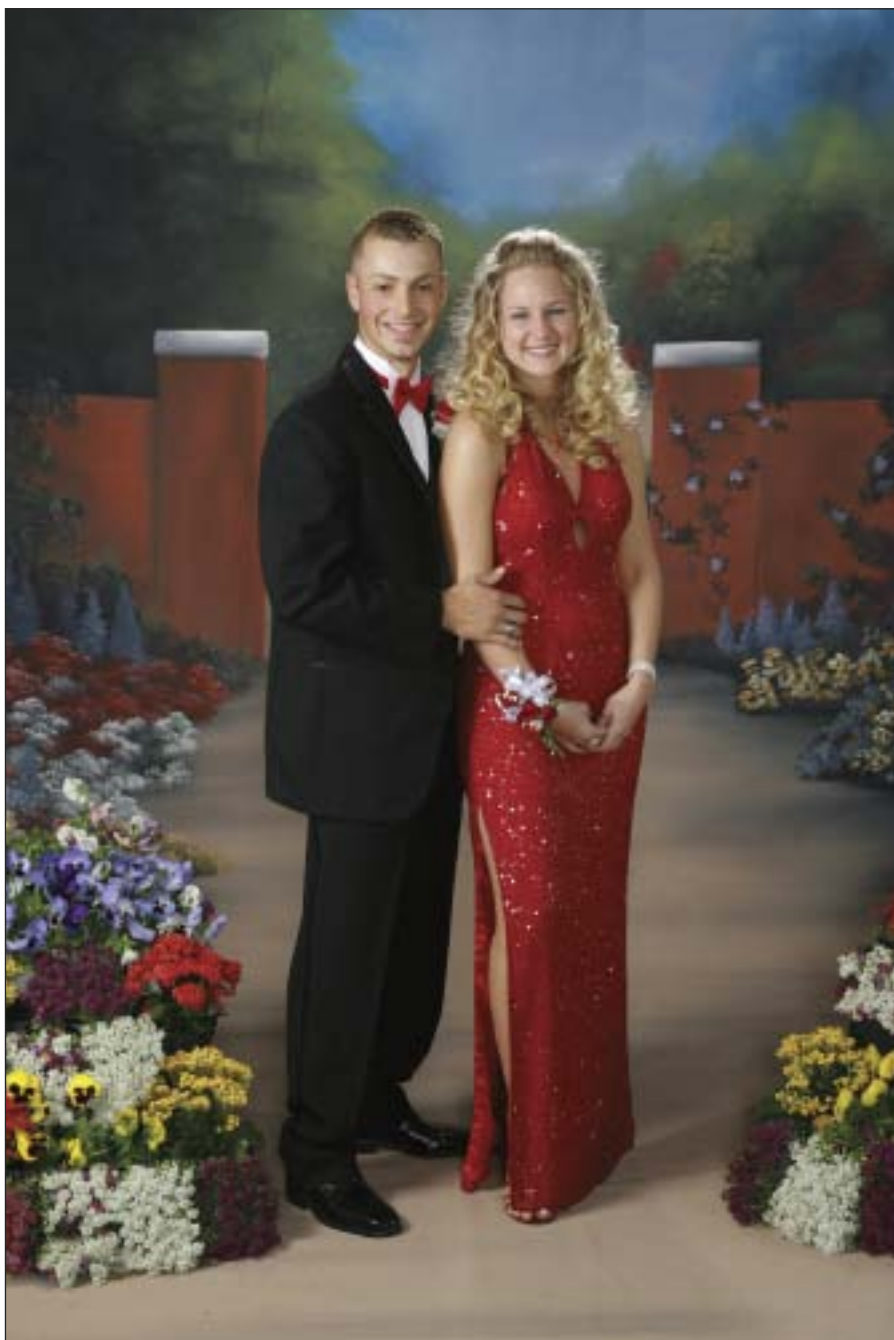
*Lighting.* I recommend using at least a two-light setup. Using only one light will create flat light and simply will not be as attractive. I set my fill light (at  $f/8.0$ ) behind the camera and the main light (at  $f/8.7$ ) off to one side. This gives you an overall reading of about  $f/11.2$  with about a 2:1 ratio on your subjects. Set your camera at  $f/11$  and your shutter speed at  $1/125$  second. (Check the histogram on your digital camera to ensure you have achieved the lighting ratio you want.) Sometimes, depending on the background that is selected, we may use three or four lights on the background.

*Subject Placement.* Place the couples about 5 feet away from the background. When cropping your subjects in the camera, be sure to allow some space at the top and bottom. Having the subjects' heads too close to the edge of the frame will not look good.

*Group Pictures.* At most dances, students will also want their photographs taken in large groups, which can result in hundreds of dollars in extra sales. We do not photograph any groups until all of the couples have been photographed. Groups take more time to photograph than couples, and also require a change in the lighting setup. We charge a fee for each person who wants to buy the picture, but do not charge students if they are in the picture and don't purchase it.

*Candid.* More than likely, you will also want to take candid photographs of the dance for the yearbook advisor. Try to get as many students as possible in the pictures. Remember, everyone likes to be in the yearbook.

*End of the Shoot.* Have the disc jockey announce a last call for pictures before you start to take down your lights. Before you leave for the evening, be



Leaving some space around your subjects allows the image to be cropped to a number of different print sizes without any costly retouching tasks.



sure to contact the teacher in charge of the dance to let her know when she can expect the pictures to be delivered to the school. Our normal delivery time is about three weeks. Package the pictures neatly, and put them in alphabetical order so they can be passed out easily to students, just as you would a team-sports package (see chapter 9).

*Staying Open the Night of the Dance.* Many times, a photography studio close to the dance location will open on prom night, hoping that the students will have their pictures taken at their studio instead of the dance. The studio owner has students pass out flyers stating that they will be open on dance night. Although you may get some students to come into your studio, this may very well backfire on you later. If and when the school is looking for a new photographer, any ill will you created with the school by opening your studio on dance night reduces the chances you'll be considered for the contract.

**Other Images.** When you land a contract to photograph the teams at a school, you may also be called upon to photograph the senior class. This could be the school grounds or at an off-site location. Additionally, you may need to shoot pictures of the school-board members, teachers, office personnel, parents' nights, and more.

### **YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR LAST JOB**

Great past work might get you a job, but how you do the job you were just hired for will determine whether or not you will be doing additional assignments for the school. Be sure to deliver consistent work, frame after frame. This type of work is extremely competitive, so you must make sure you never give a school any excuse not to hire you again next year.

**YOU MUST MAKE SURE YOU NEVER  
GIVE A SCHOOL ANY EXCUSE NOT TO  
HIRE YOU AGAIN NEXT YEAR.**

# 5. LEAGUE SPORTS

## HOW TO GET HIRED BY A LEAGUE

Getting hired by a sports league first and foremost involves politics. Also important are having a likeable personality and a little bit of luck. Did you notice I didn't even mention creating great photographs?

**Who Decides.** Most sports leagues are run by a board of volunteer parents. The board can consist of as few as three or as many as fifteen (or even more) volunteers. Common sense tells you everyone is not going to agree on all issues, but without their help and support, the leagues would not exist.

These boards have lots of decisions to make—game times and schedules, concession-stand products and workers, hiring umpires, buying uniforms, and dealing with parents who want to know why their child is not playing more or in a different position, just to name a few. What photographer is going to be hired is just another in a huge number of decisions on their agenda.

Leagues will generally have someone hired about six months before the assignment, so be sure to contact them well in advance of the start of the season. If you're not sure what leagues are operating in your area, check the Internet. If you're lucky, you may find that the league sites give you all the personnel and contact information you need.

**Educate the Client.** Sadly, I can assure you that few (if any) of the board members will know what is involved in photographing a large league. In general, they think the pictures and services provided by photographers are all the same; therefore, they will make their decision based on price.

Here's a good example. Some time ago, a large baseball league invited me (and several other photographers) to one of their board meetings to put on a presentation about our products and prices. About a week prior to the meeting, I prepared very professional-looking information packets to give to each board member the night of the meeting. In the packets were sample photographs and products (such as baseball trading cards, picture magnets, picture key chains, etc.). Also included were several letters of recommenda-

LEAGUES WILL GENERALLY HAVE

SOMEONE HIRED ABOUT SIX MONTHS

BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT.

Unfortunately, providing great picture quality isn't always a deciding factor in hiring for league photography. More often than not, it comes down to price.



**THEY ASSUMED THAT THE SERVICES**

**AND PICTURE QUALITY WOULD**

**ALL BE THE SAME . . .**

tion from other league presidents, high-school yearbook advisors, and athletic directors for whom we were currently doing work. I thought they would undoubtedly want to contact some of these individuals for references before they hired anyone to photograph a large league, but I was wrong. All that mattered was who offered the most sports trinkets and the lowest price. The people making the decision assumed that the services and picture quality would all be the same, so they made their decision based on price alone. About six years ago, the same league signed a local part-time photographer—someone who had never taken a single photograph for the league—to a three-year contract. Her picture day with the kids was about as organized as a Chinese fire drill!



Ultimately, the board members don't know what is involved in delivering excellent photographs in a timely manner. Therefore, they focus on what they *do* understand, which is price. It's up to you to convince them that choosing someone on price alone may get them in trouble.

**Your Presentation.** Some sports leagues may want you to give a brief presentation about your products and services before they make a hiring decision. As I mentioned previously, we present each board member with a professional-looking packet that contains all the information they need to know about our studio, the products we offer, and (of course) pricing and delivery times.

Again, their inclination will simply be to choose the cheapest guy. This can be quite frustrating, but all you can really do is present a solid case for your company, provide a list of references, and let the chips fall where they may. There really is no sure-fire way to convince them you are the one for them. If you know some of the board members and they like you, I would say you have a better chance than those who don't know anyone. Politics is the game you have to play in this type of business. As I mentioned in chapter 1, this is a good reason to get involved in community groups. The more people you know, the better the chance you'll see a friendly face on the board of the league you want to work for.

## ORGANIZING THE TEAMS FOR PICTURE DAY

**Time Schedule.** Once you have the job, you will need to create a time schedule for photographing the teams. This is something you will want to coordinate with the person in charge of the league. When you do this, keep in mind that you may very well be dealing with someone who has no idea what is involved in the process (or, worse yet, someone who *thinks* they know how to create a schedule).



Choosing based on price alone can get a league in trouble. Parents want great images of their kids, and they want them delivered on time.



A team photography shoot starts off with portraits of the individual team members.



Once the athletes have been photographed individually, the second photographer can complete the group pose(s) and shoot the team portraits.

To get started, find out how many people you will be photographing and how much time you have to work with. This will determine how much help you will need to have. If you can devote approximately fifteen minutes to each team, which will work with most leagues with under 400 members, you can set up a good system with two photographers. Basically, as the players start to show up for their appointed time, we immediately start to photograph the individuals. After a player is photographed individually, they go to the second photographer to get set up for the team photograph. There will *always* be late arrivals, but photographing the individuals first means we don't have to waste time waiting around for every last team member to show up before we start.

With this system, you will need (in addition to the two photographers) a third person to take the envelopes from the players and log the appropriate frame number from the camera onto each player's envelope. A fourth person will be your poser and help keep the players moving. If possible, arrange for someone with authority from the league to be there to see how everything is going. This is very competitive work, and you must get everything right!

If the league is over 400 players, and they want everyone photographed in one day, you will need a double setup. You will also need to allow more time if you are doing the photography outside. Changing light and weather conditions will inevitably slow you down (see chapter 6 for more on this).

**Order Forms.** Picture order forms are usually delivered to the league president or the person in charge of photography for the league. Sometimes, we deliver the forms on a day when a game is being played; other times, some-

**FIND OUT HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU**

**WILL BE PHOTOGRAPHING AND HOW**

**MUCH TIME YOU HAVE TO WORK WITH.**



one from the league will come into the studio and pick up the forms. On rare occasions, they may be mailed. The forms should be in the players' hands about three weeks prior to the shoot. Yet, no matter how many forms you give out prior to picture day, there will be many players who still come to the shoot without a form. Therefore, you need to be sure to bring a lot of extra forms with you on the day of the shoot. We generally have fifty percent more forms printed than we need, simply because of the number of forms that are lost or never received by the coach. It doesn't matter that you passed out plenty of forms before picture day—you will be the bad guy if you don't have extras available!

## THE PHOTO SHOOT

The day has come for the photo shoot. The first thing you will need to do is figure out the best traffic flow for the day. You don't want the kids walking through an obstacle course of cords and equipment.

At this shoot for a baseball league, a table is set up to display the various products. Beyond that is the table where kids check in. At the far end of the gym, you can see the backdrop and lights are set up and ready to go.

Where the parents and kids will walk into the shooting area, you should have a table set up to display all of the trinkets you are offering. Have each item marked with the letter that corresponds with the item on your price list. For younger kids, display a large poster with all of the different poses kids can pick from for their photograph (see chapter 7 for more on this). You will also





In this series of pictures, you can see our setup for an indoor baseball league shoot. The woman sitting at the table is taking the parents' envelopes. I'm holding the camera taking the individual photographs. The woman in the red top is posing the players. Not pictured is another photographer who is photographing the groups. The teams are scheduled every fifteen minutes, so you had better be well organized and sure of what you're doing!



need a table for your envelope taker to sit at so she can answer any questions the parents may have about the packages and additional items.

I think it goes without saying all of the people you have working on the shoot should be dressed professionally and able to work with parents (and possibly unruly kids) in a polite and pleasant manner. Dealing with kids all day takes a great deal of patience.

With a good schedule in place and some experienced help, your photo shoot will run very smoothly. Staying on schedule is extremely important, and that means being ready to start on time. The parents have taken time out of their busy day to bring their child in for pictures—and they have lots of things to do other than standing around because you are running behind. If you don't have enough help or are inexperienced at team photography, this is where you will definitely get into trouble.

Because they are common to both school and league photography, the lighting and posing techniques required to create top-quality images are covered in chapters 6 and 7.

### **SCHEDULE A RETAKE DAY**

As noted in the section on school photography, you should also schedule a retake day for your league contracts. See chapter 4 for more on this.

### **DON'T REST ON YOUR LAURELS**

League boards are constantly changing. As their kids grow and are not involved in the league anymore, most parents resign from the board. Board members also resign over disagreements between members, changing shifts at a job, and for many other reasons. Every time this happens, it means you are dealing with a new crop of “photo experts”—people you'll need to educate to get or keep a contract with the league.

This changing of the guard also underscores the need to get everything right. But just remember, *nothing* will guarantee that you will be hired again next year. However, if people like you and see you having fun with the kids when you are taking their pictures, you will have an advantage over someone who is impatient and rude with the players. Additionally, you must do everything to the best of your abilities—from the photography to prompt delivery of the product. Never give the league an excuse not to hire you again next year.

**THEY HAVE LOTS OF THINGS TO DO**

**OTHER THAN STANDING AROUND**

**BECAUSE YOU ARE RUNNING BEHIND.**



## 6. INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PORTRAITS

### INDOOR SHOOTS

**Backdrops.** Typically, if I am photographing a band or sports league in a single location I will use a large backdrop. This is another way of communicating the professional quality of my work. Photographing baseball leagues, high-school bands, soccer leagues, etc., inside with a themed background has a lot of other advantages, too. First, you can use your own studio lighting, so you do not need to contend with harsh sunlight or conditions that change over the course of the the day, as you would in an outdoor portrait. Second, you don't have to worry about equipment, doors, signs, or other

Working with a studio backdrop eliminates the need to worry about background distractions.



Using studio lighting also creates a more three-dimensional look in your photographs. Here, we used a gelled background light to add depth—and the school color—to the picture.



**WHEN POSSIBLE, I PREFER  
TO USE UMBRELLA LIGHTING  
ON INDOOR SPORTS JOBS.**

potentially distracting elements in the background. When you use a studio background, it's much easier to keep the focus on the subject of the image.

**Studio Lighting.** When possible, I prefer to use umbrella lighting on indoor sports jobs. No on-camera flash can give you the lighting you get with an umbrella. When doing this type of assignment, I will use as least two lights and sometimes up to four lights. When multiple lights are properly placed and metered, your photographs will have a look that few part-time sports photographers can achieve.

As we go through this section, it should be noted that you will need to work quickly when photographing a team. As such, you won't have as much time to spending finessing your lighting as you would in an average studio session. I have presented the information you need to attain great results, but you may need to adapt these techniques based on the shooting condi-





**FACING PAGE**—Adding a blue background light behind this majorette adds additional punch to the picture. Also, notice the beautiful 3:1 lighting ratio on the girl's face.

## WHEN CALCULATING LIGHTING

**RATIOS, THE FILL LIGHT IS ALWAYS  
CALCULATED AS ONE UNIT OF LIGHT.**

tions, the time available, and the number of people you have assisting you on the shoot.

*Fill and Main Lights.* To produce a professional-looking photograph you must create depth, form, and shape on the face. In other words, we do not want flat lighting on our subjects. This means that you will need to use at least two lights: a fill light, and a main light. As noted, I use umbrellas for my team photography shoots, but you may decide another type of modifier better suits your needs.

A fill light placed behind the camera will give you an overall light illuminating the whole scene. I suggest placing the fill light approximately ten feet high and behind the camera and setting the power output at  $f/8$ . Many photographers capture dance couples, players, etc., with just a fill light—but your photographs will look much better when you introduce a main light.

The main light creates shadows on the side of the face, and the shadows create depth. It should be placed about four feet away from the subject either to the left or right, and set at approximately  $f/11$ . This will create some depth and add shadows to the face, taking away the flat look that you will get with just one light. The height of the main light will depend on the height of your subject. It's right when it creates nice catchlights in their eyes.

*Light Ratios.* A lighting ratio is a numeric expression of the difference in intensity between the shadow and highlight side of the face in portraiture. This is an indication of how much shadow detail you will have in the final portrait.

When calculating lighting ratios, the fill light is always calculated as one unit of light because it strikes both the highlight and shadow sides of the face equally. Therefore, if you made a portrait using only the fill light, the ratio would be 1:1 (the light on both sides of the face would be the same, creating a very flat look). When a main light is added, it strikes only the highlight side of the face, and each full stop of light it produces (above the level of the fill light) is counted as two units.

## BROAD LIGHTING AND SHORT LIGHTING

There are two basic types of portrait lighting: broad and short. In broad lighting, the main light illuminates the side of the face turned toward the camera; this tends to flatten out facial contours and widen the face. In short lighting, the main light illuminates the side of the face turned away from the camera; this emphasizes facial contours. This enhances the shape of the face, making it a better choice, in most cases, than broad lighting.

For example, imagine you are photographing a baseball player and the main light is set one stop (two units) greater than the fill light (one unit). The one unit of the fill is added to the two units of the main light, yielding a 3:1 ratio; three units of light fall on the highlight sides of the face, while only one unit falls on the shadow sides. This ratio will yield an exposure with excellent shadow and highlight detail. It shows good roundness in the face and is flattering for average-shaped faces. With your fill light set at  $f/8$  and your main light set at  $f/11$  (as I have suggested above), you will create precisely this pleasing light ratio.

Having a higher lighting ratio (or total darkness on the shadow side of the face) generally does not look as good as being able to see the face on the shadow side.

*Hair Light.* If you really want to enhance the photograph, place a light with a honeycomb diffuser (set at about  $f/8$ ) behind the middle of the background and tilt it down toward the subject's hair. This creates a narrow beam of light that you can keep just on the hair.

The color and length of the subject's hair will determine the ideal amount and placement of the hair light. In general, lighter and shorter hair requires less light than darker and longer hair. If your subject has short hair, you will only need enough light on the head to slightly accent the hair and keep it from blending into the background. On subjects with long hair, you are going to need more light; positioning the light higher will give you the broader coverage that is required.

Be careful not to have any of the light spill onto the subject's ears or nose. Setting your hair light about a stop or two less than the main light and positioning it approximately 12 inches from their head is a good place to start. Using a hair light with louvers (sometimes called barn doors) on both sides will be a big help in controlling the light.

*Background Light.* A fourth light can be used off to the side to illuminate the background. This will create a greater sense of depth in the background, adding a nice glow behind the subject. The power output of the background light will depend upon how dark or light your background is. Generally, setting it at about  $f/8$  will give you good results.

**White Balance and Exposure.** When using electronic strobes inside I simply set my white balance to the flash mode. This is also a good all-around setting if you are not sure where to set the white balance. I set my ISO to approximately 200, giving me plenty of speed for the strobes. If I find that my exposure is a little off, I simply move the ISO up or down on the camera. This method makes it easy to get the correct exposure without having to change the output of the lights.

**FACING PAGE—**The background of this image was illuminated with a grid spot placed on a Photogenic light to the side of the subject. This created a good sense of depth in the photograph.

**POSITIONING THE LIGHT HIGHER WILL  
GIVE YOU THE BROADER COVERAGE  
THAT IS REQUIRED.**





## OUTDOOR PORTRAITS

If the players have a choice, they usually want to have their sessions outside. This is logical—after all, that’s where most sports are played. Additionally, outdoor portraits can be less generic; you might even be able to include part of the school or the team scoreboard. I do a lot of teams outside, but there are some significant complications you will encounter when working in these conditions.

**Potential Problems.** First of all, you do not want to take the photographs in the sun. Direct sunlight produces portraits with too much contrast. The

**BELOW—**Boys’ and girls’ soccer has become extremely popular at high schools in the past several years. These particular images were taken on a bright, sunny day—not an ideal situation for outdoor photographs. A fast shutter speed with lots of flash helped to even out the bright background. **FACING PAGE—**On an overcast day or in the cover of shade, you can often find very gentle lighting. Here, on-camera flash was used for a little fill and to add catchlights in the eyes.











**FACING PAGE**—When photographing basketball teams, sometimes the coaches do not want give up the gym for pictures. This image of a cheerleader was taken out in the hallway of the school with 135mm f/2.0 lens. Shooting the picture at a large aperture created the blurred background, making the subject stand out sharply in the photograph.

## CHEERLEADERS

The cheerleaders are usually the most time-consuming group to deal with. When I am scheduling pictures, I always photograph the cheerleaders last if at all possible. If you have them scheduled first, they will put you behind schedule for the entire day.

With cheerleaders, their hair and pose is almost always a major issue. Most of the cheerleaders I have photographed over the years will listen to your suggestions about a pose and do what you ask them to do. Others, however, will not—instead, they will insist on doing something that you know will not look flattering, or they will ask one of their friends how they should pose. (After all, why should they ask me? I’m only a Master Craftsman photographer with nearly twenty-five years of experience.)

About all you can do is shoot the pose they want and then do another one that you know will look good. This way you are covered when the cheerleader’s mother calls to ask you what “idiot” posed her daughter.

shadows are too harsh and dark for appealing images. Additionally, at mid-day, the sun is so high in the sky that it often produces dark shadows on the eye sockets (sometimes called “raccoon eyes”). This is a mistake I see over and over again. Photographing in the sun can also lead to squinting; this is not an expression that anyone likes in a portrait.

Another issue when photographing outside is that the light changes constantly. If clouds roll in, the settings on your camera (and flash) will need to be changed. Even if clouds aren’t an issue, the position of the sun will also change over the course of the shoot; this means you have to constantly make slight changes in your camera settings. Also, there will be times when you will start an assignment late in the afternoon and will still be shooting into the early evening, a time when the light can change dramatically in just a few minutes.

The remaining big issues when photographing sports teams outside are environmental. Wind can be a serious issue—especially with girls. Sometimes the wind can make it almost impossible to get a good picture of a girl who has long hair. You may also have to contend with any number of bugs, bees, etc. Finally, there is the potential for bad weather to delay your shoot at any time.

**Lighting Techniques.** The key element to achieving great lighting outdoors is learning to identify places with good light and placing your subjects effectively within those locations. Photographing players outside requires

**THE WIND CAN MAKE IT ALMOST**

**IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A GOOD PICTURE**

**OF A GIRL WITH LONG HAIR.**





**FACING PAGE AND RIGHT**—Photographing players outside in the sun is a challenge. In these images, the players were positioned in the shade, the shutter speed was fast, and fill flash was used to create balanced lighting on the subjects' faces.



## **SIMPLY SETTING YOUR CAMERA**

### **ON AUTO AND SHOOTING AWAY**

#### **IS A RECIPE FOR DISASTER.**

lighting skills that most part-time (and even many full-time) photographers don't fully understand. Simply setting your camera on auto and shooting away is a recipe for disaster, yet many people do just that. Automatic settings are fine with ideal lighting, but ideal lighting doesn't come along very often, especially outdoors. Anyone who takes this approach to outdoor team photography should not be doing this type of work—and if they *are*, I can guarantee that they won't be doing it for long!

*Overcast Days.* The best possible lighting conditions you can hope for when photographing players outside is a cloudy sky. This produces soft, natural light everywhere. Since the light is the same both in front of and behind the subject, metering the light for the scene is as easy as it's going to get.

On an overcast day, the light may be too soft and produce no shadows. Just like a portrait made indoors with studio lighting, a good outdoor por-



trait will show the shape and form of the face. If the light doesn't do this adequately, consider adding a gobo, a device used to block light from hitting select areas of the subject. In addition to the many commercially available gobos, there are many natural gobos in outdoor situations. Often, I use a wall or trees for this purpose, but a porch can be another good gobo, blocking almost all of the overhead light. If you can find a natural gobo and place your subject in the correct position in relationship to the direction of the light, a supplemental gobo will not be needed.

*Sunny Days.* You are not always going to get a cloudy sky. If it's sunny, you are going to want to photograph your players in the shade—that is, of course, assuming there *is* shade in the general area of the shot. If not, you are going to need a large reflector. This can be used to open up shadows when the ambient light produces too much contrast or doesn't light the face properly. I personally like to use a 36-inch silver reflector when working outdoors. I've tried gold, but I felt that the skin tones this type of reflector produced didn't look natural. When bouncing light this way, keep track of the subject's eyes; the reflected light causes some people to squint, resulting in a very unpleasant expression. If this happens, you may need to forego the reflector and use a little flash fill. Generally I will have the flash set at about half a stop less than the camera aperture setting.

Another approach is to bring in a small two-step ladder so an assistant can hold the reflector over the head of each player as they are being photographed. In this case, the reflector actually works as a gobo, shading your subject and helping minimize squinting.

If you've placed your subject in shade to get good lighting on the face, you've solved one problem—but you may have created another. Namely, the background may be in full sun, rendering it much brighter than the subject. When this occurs, you will need to add fill flash to balance the subject with the background.

If it's an extremely bright day, start by setting your camera's ISO to 100. Next, determine the distance to your subject for proper flash exposure. Set the flash on automatic output, but minus about a half to one full stop to ensure that you do not put too much flash on the face. You want the photograph to look natural, with just enough extra light to balance the subject with the background, brighten the shadows on the eye sockets, and add nice catchlights. (*Note:* You will need an excellent flash unit for this to work properly in automatic mode. If you are using an older flash, set the unit on low-power manual mode; you are not going to need a lot of flash output. Again, your goal is to have the flash output at about a half to one full stop below your aperture setting.)

**FACING PAGE**—When photographing players outdoors, try to find an area with some depth and shade. As you can see in this picture of a beautiful little girl, a bit of fill flash was used to light up her eyes with a little twinkle. Too much flash would have created a dark area under her chin. Perfectly balanced flash with available light will always create outstanding photographs.

**THE BACKGROUND MAY BE IN  
FULL SUN, RENDERING IT MUCH  
BRIGHTER THAN THE SUBJECT.**



## METERING FLASH OUTPUT

Just a word of caution, when metering flash output outdoors: be sure to adjust the shutter-speed setting on the meter to its maximum. Otherwise, the ambient light will affect the measurement and give you an incorrect reading. Of course, with digital photography flash meters are just about not needed; you can look on the back of the camera and check your results. Personally, I use the meter to get close to where I want to be, then adjust the camera settings and simply look at the camera display to confirm that I have achieved the desired results.

So, let's assume you have your aperture set at  $f/5.6$  and you've got your flash set properly to put just a little sparkle on the face. Now that we have set the aperture, we need to set the shutter speed in relation to it in order to attain the proper exposure. Here's the important thing to remember: the shutter speed has no bearing on how much flash is going to be recorded on the subject's face. It does, however, control the amount of ambient light that will be recorded. Since the background is lit only by ambient light, it is the area that will be directly affected by the shutter speed.

With the aperture set at  $f/5.6$ , how do you determine the correct shutter speed? Simply meter just the background with the camera set at  $f/5.6$  and set your shutter speed accordingly. You can make the background a bit lighter by selecting a longer shutter speed, or darken it a bit by selecting a shorter shutter speed (down to the camera's flash-sync speed). If you are handholding your camera, keep in mind you must have your shutter speed set to at least the effective focal length of the lens or you run the risk of getting camera shake.

Completely understanding this relationship is essential to properly exposing your images. Before you take on any kind of work involving outdoor portraits, working with your camera and flash should be just like breathing—you don't have to think about it, you just do it.

**WORKING WITH YOUR**

**CAMERA AND FLASH SHOULD BE**

**JUST LIKE BREATHING.**



## 7. POSING TECHNIQUES

**P**osing, like lighting, is something that takes a great deal of practice. One of the main elements to good posing is making your subject look natural and relaxed. Try to make the subject appear as if they didn't know you were going to take their picture. One of the best ways to improve your posing is to study the photographs you have taken. Look at every little detail of the pose, and ask yourself what could be improved.

With team sports photography, you don't have the leisure of a long session to tweak every little thing, but that doesn't mean you can't apply the foundational techniques of good posing and try to make every subject look their best. You just have to keep in mind how much time you have, how big the job is, and how much help you have. Your experience will also be a factor.

In this chapter, we'll cover the basic poses and posing principles, as well as some tips for putting them into practice.

### THE BASIC POSES

**Head-and-Shoulders Poses.** Many simple things can be done to help your subjects look better in their photographs. Let's start with a basic head-and-shoulders pose.

If there's one flaw that's common to most head-and-shoulder portraits, it's that the camera angle is too low. Look at a high-school yearbook, and you will see many students looking down at the camera. In my opinion, the lens should be several inches above the subject's nose. This will cause your subject to look up at the lens, creating a very pleasing effect. Their eyes will look more attractive and the camera angle will even thin out their face slightly. Using a small step stool can help you get to the correct camera height.

Also, you should have your subject's face and body at opposite angles to the camera for a head-and-shoulders pose. If the subject's body is angled to the right, then his head should be turned in the opposite direction, looking back toward the camera (and vice versa). By turning the head and shoulders in different directions, a more dynamic image is produced.

IN MY OPINION, THE LENS  
SHOULD BE SEVERAL INCHES  
ABOVE THE SUBJECT'S NOSE.

Another reason why you should strive to differ the head and shoulder angles in relation to the camera is that photographing someone straight-on to the camera for a head-and-shoulders pose will make them look broader. If you want to see what someone looks like in a straight-on pose, look at your driver's license. That pretty much says it all. If your subject is very small—let's say a high-school senior girl who weighs about 95 pounds—you might get away with photographing her straight-on; for everyone else, posing at a slight angle to the camera is best. The bigger the person, the more you should turn them away from the camera.

**Three-Quarter-Length Poses.** These poses are done with the subject standing and are cropped midthigh or midcalf. Again, you want the subject positioned at an angle to the camera. Placement of the hands is important in this type of pose. Having the clients' thumbs anchored in pants pockets, on their hips, or on a prop works well. Be sure not to crop hands or arms out of the image.

**Full-Length Poses.** The rules that apply to three-quarter-length poses also apply to full-length shots. Full-length poses make the subject's face appear quite small, however, particularly in wallet-sized photographs. This can reduce their appeal (and salability) to parents.

## **TIPS FOR FLATTERING THE BODY**

**The Shoulders.** As noted above, the subject's shoulders should be turned at an angle to the camera. Having the shoulders face the camera makes the person look wider than he or she really is and can yield a static composition.

**Tilting the Head.** Tilting the head slightly produces diagonal lines that can help a pose feel more dynamic. In men's portraits, the traditional rule is to tilt the head toward the far or low shoulder. In women's portraits, the head is traditionally tilted toward the near or high shoulder for a feminine look. These rules, however, are often broken.

**Chin Height.** A medium chin height is desirable. If the person's chin is too high, he may look conceited and his neck may appear elongated. If the person's chin is too low, he may look timid and appear to have a double chin or no neck.

**Eyes.** In almost all portraits, the eyes are the most important part of the face. Typically, eyes look best when the iris borders the eyelids. If the subject is squinting or too wide-eyed, the image will not be appealing.

**Arms.** Whether male or female, the subject's arms should be separated at least slightly from the torso. This creates a space that slims the appearance of the upper body. It also creates a triangular base for the composition, leading the viewer's eye up to the subject's face.

**FACING PAGE**—In a three-quarter-length pose, the head and body are, ideally, at an angle to the camera. The placement of the hands is critical in this kind of pose, so be sure to give them something to do—like holding a prop.

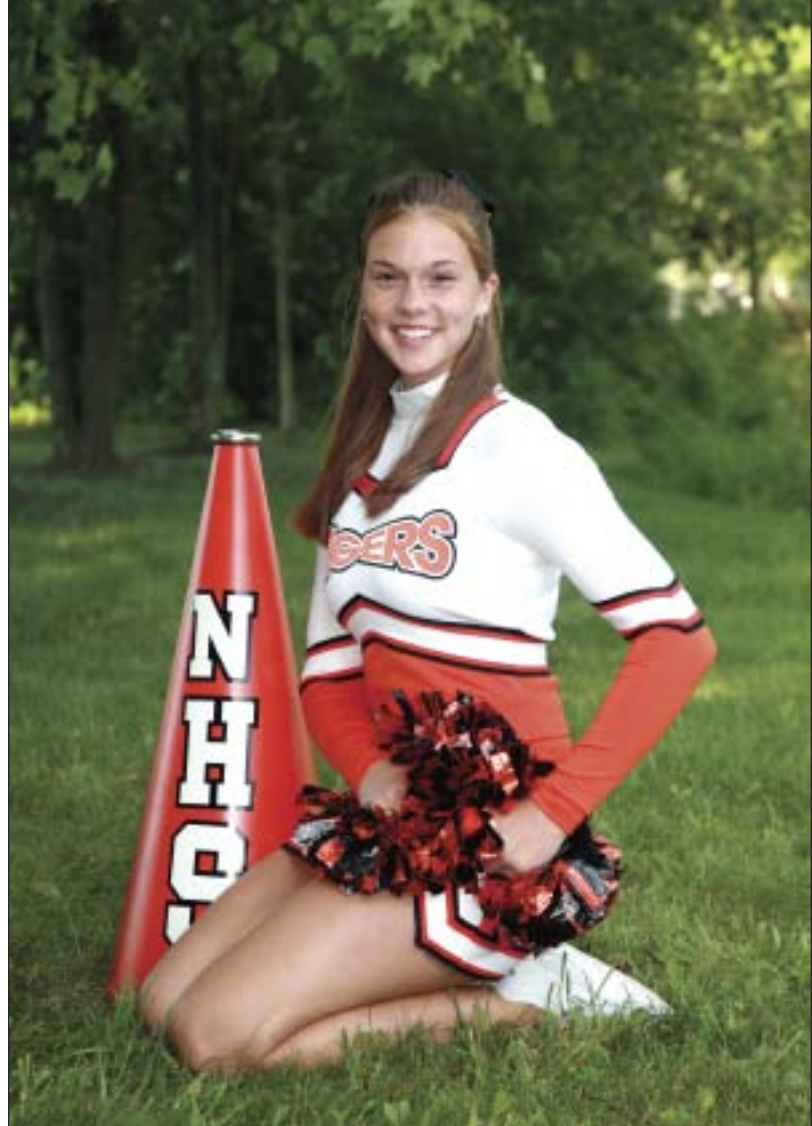
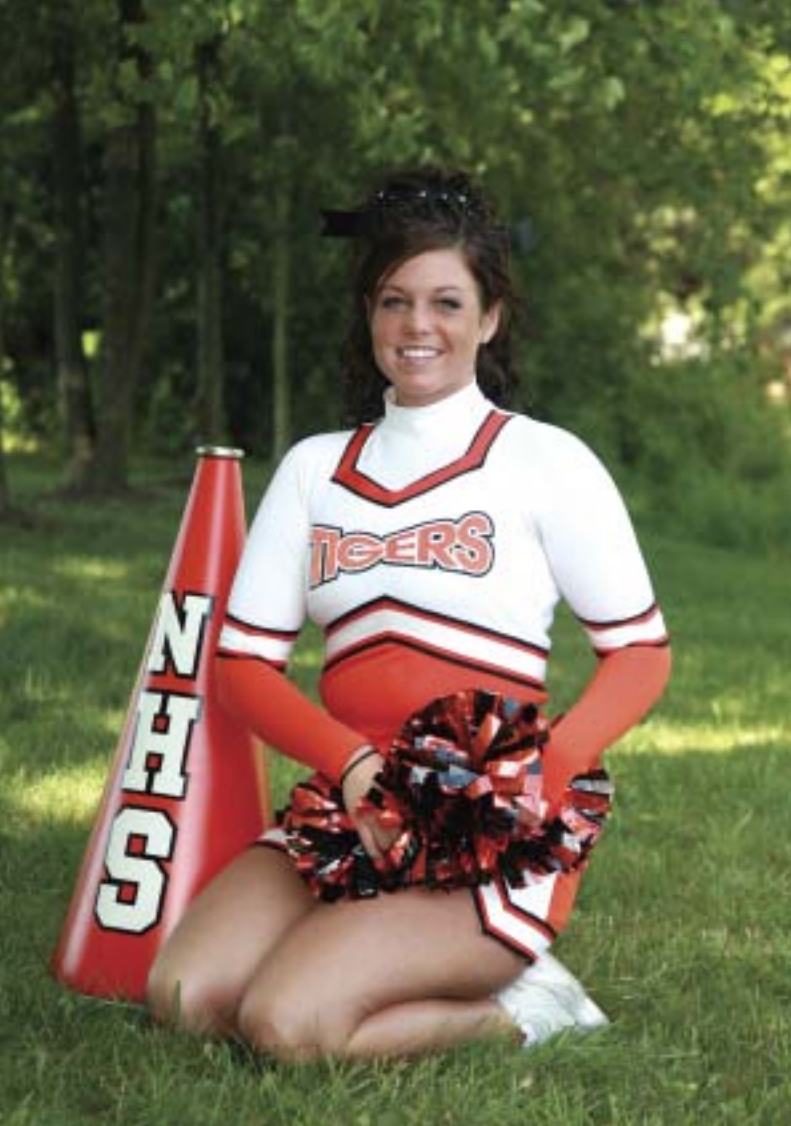
**IF THE SUBJECT IS SQUINTING**

**OR TOO WIDE-EYED, THE IMAGE**

**WILL NOT BE APPEALING.**







**Hands.** Keep the hands at an angle to the lens to avoid distorting their size and shape. Photographing the outer edge of the hand produces a more appealing look than showing the back of the hand or the palm, which may look unnaturally large (especially when close to the face). Additionally, it is usually advised that the hands should be at different heights in the image. This creates a diagonal line that makes the pose more dynamic. Hands are often easiest to pose when they have something to do—either a prop to hold or something to rest upon.

**Torso.** Good posture, with the chest lifted and shoulders dropped, is critical to a flattering image.

**Legs.** If the legs show, they should be posed independently rather than identically. Typically, one leg is straighter and used to support the body (or in a seated pose, to connect the subject to the floor). The other leg is bent to create a more interesting line in the composition. Having the subject put his or her weight on the back foot shifts the body slightly away from the camera for a more flattering appearance than having the weight distributed evenly on both feet.

Separating the arms from the torso prevents the body from looking like a solid mass.





**Hips and Thighs.** Most female subjects are concerned about this area. For the slimmest appearance in a standing pose, turn the hips at an angle to the camera and away from the main light.

**Feet.** Feet often look distorted when the toes are pointed directly at the camera. It is best to show the feet from an angle. In portraits of women, the toes are often pointed. This flexes the calf muscles, creating a slimmer appearance and lengthening the visual line of the subject's legs.

### **TIPS FOR POSING INDIVIDUAL PLAYERS**

**Young Athletes.** We found that photographing young soccer and baseball players works best if you have a posing guide on display for them to look at before they are photographed. We have a large poster board with four different poses on it and a letter below each pose. This gives the kids and parents some idea what they want before they get in front of the camera. I know other studios that take several

**LEFT**—Good posture is important for a flattering image. **BELOW**—In portraits of cheerleaders, having the toes pointed makes the legs look their best—something young ladies are often concerned about.



different poses of each player and choose the best one. In my experience, however, having the players in several different poses is only going to slow you down.

**Teen Athletes (and Older).** We don't use the posing guide for our high-school students. Many times, these subjects will have something in mind that they want to do. If not, you can guide them into a simple pose that you know will be flattering. With the high school students, the main thing to remember is to have fun—don't take things too seriously, and your shoot will go smoothly.

## EXPRESSION

It is critical to get a good expression on the player's face—after all, expression sells pictures. Nothing will disappoint a parent more than a photograph of their child with a poor expression of their face. To achieve this, you must be able to have fun with the kids. Just asking a child to smile for their picture is not going to be enough. Instead, keep talking with them while you are watching their expression and be ready shoot at the exact moment when you see that great look. This is the key ingredient that is going to separate you



For younger players, a display board gives them four poses to choose from.



Be sure to let the students express themselves. These two players have skills they wanted to show off to the camera.



A great expression looks natural, not forced. This is a key to producing images that sell.



from the others doing this type of work. Not everyone is going to walk up to you with a big beautiful smile on their face, but it is up to you to make everyone look good, nonetheless. Anyone can do the easy ones; a real pro gets them all!

**HAIR, JEWELRY, CLOTHING, AND**

**BALL CAPS ALL NEED TO BE JUST**

**RIGHT BEFORE YOU FIRE THE CAMERA.**

## **STYLING**

Hair, jewelry, clothing, and ball caps all need to be just right before you fire the camera. For this reason, I strongly recommend having someone work as a poser. This person can remain near the subjects while you stay at the camera and work on getting great expressions. Constantly running between the camera and the subject is, in my opinion, not a good way to operate. I have helped at other studios who did not have a poser at the subject's side and the results were not as good.

I would, furthermore, recommend a female poser. For obvious reasons, clothing adjustments and hair fixes on a female subject should only be done by another female. Having a poser with a great personality will help create even better expressions. When you find someone who is good at this, try to keep them working with you—they can be a great asset. A good poser will come to know what needs to be fixed before you even say it and adjust the subject accordingly.

There are a whole lot of people who need all the help they can get in a portrait. In these cases, simple things like posing their head and chin properly, adjusting the position of their glasses, or smoothing their hair or clothing, can all have a major impact on the final outcome of the picture.

The bottom line when posing any client is that you must get something that looks good before you leave the job. If you don't, you will be the person who looks bad. Picture day is something that most students look forward to and enjoy, so have fun with them and give them results they can be proud of.

## POSING GROUPS AND TEAMS

Posing groups of players takes some practice and little bit of time. Like posing the individuals, the age of the group will determine the time need. The best advice I can give you is to simply study the poses in this book.

Your most difficult groups will be the youngest players. I have always said that photographing five- and six-year-old players in a group is like trying to photograph popcorn in a hot pan—they are jumping up and down all the

**A GOOD POSER WILL**

**COME TO KNOW WHAT NEEDS TO BE**

**FIXED BEFORE YOU EVEN SAY IT.**



Groups usually look more cohesive when the flanking subjects are turned in slightly toward the center of the image.



In the top image, the mirrored poses of the two girls at the edges of the group create the base for a pyramid composition. In the image to the left, a similar concept is used for a portrait of two teammates.

time. If you are photographing inside with flash, be sure to have a large light source behind the camera for soft, even light over the entire group.

In a group portrait, each subject should be posed individually in a flattering way, and the grouping as a whole must also appear interesting and attractive. The following are some basic concepts to keep in mind.

**Bookending.** Groups look best when the flanking subjects (the subjects at the outside edge of the group) face in toward the center of the frame. These inward-oriented faces serve to bookend the composition, constantly directing the viewer's eyes back into the image. Another option is to have these subjects in mirrored poses that create a "frame" for the rest of the group.

**Head Heights.** The basic rules of group portrait photography state that the heads of the subjects should not be at the same height or directly on top of each other. In team photography, however, this rule is sometimes broken in order to show the group in matching lines. This can suggest the disciplined, organized nature of the group.





Here are two different approaches to a group portrait. In the image of the cheerleaders, the girls are shown in two matching lines. This gives the portrait a more regimented feel and makes the squad look very organized. The fact that each girl is identically posed reinforces this idea for a very polished look. The portrait of the football players shows the guys grouped around several ATVs. The individual poses are much more casual and the result is a very relaxed, natural-feeling image.



In larger groups, the heads should be arranged so that the individual faces create a dynamic pattern throughout the frame. For example, the subjects may be posed on stairs so their faces form a diagonal line through the frame. Alternately, subgroups might be arranged so that their faces form a series of linked circles or diamonds in the frame. Other popular shapes that can be created with the faces in group portraits are S curves and pyramids.

**Hands.** In group portraits, hands can be a problem. If the hands will be shown, strive to follow the rules covered on page 90. Additionally, check to ensure that any hands appearing in the frame are clearly connected to an arm (*i.e.*, they do not seem to be either floating or coming out of nowhere).

**SUBGROUPS MIGHT BE ARRANGED**

**SO THAT THEIR FACES FORM A SERIES**

**OF LINKED CIRCLES IN THE FRAME.**



Often, the best strategy is to hide as many of the hands as possible. This can be accomplished by putting them in pockets, obscuring them with other subjects, or concealing them with props.

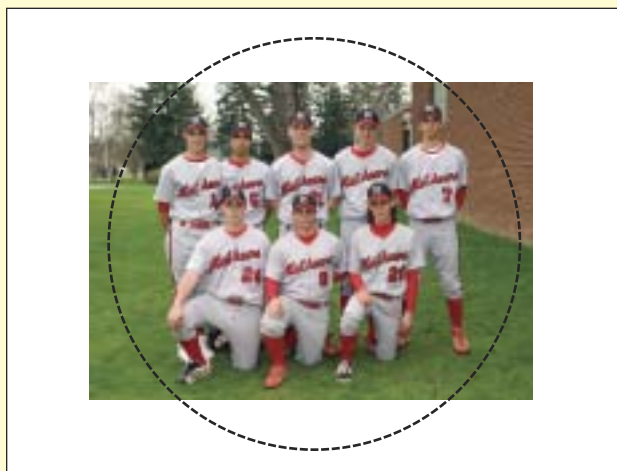
**Subject Proximity.** Placing the subjects relatively close to each other conveys a sense of camaraderie. Allowing for more space between the subjects generally creates a slightly more regimented look, especially when paired with more structured poses.

**BELOW**—Something new this year at an area high school was a dance team. We photographed them on the same day we photographed the basketball teams. When the subjects are close together, as seen here, the image has more of a sense of warmth; you get the feeling that these girls are all the best of friends. **RIGHT**—Adding a little more space between the subjects creates a slightly more formal appearance, perfect for a picture of a team with the coaching staff.



## GROUP PORTRAITS AND BUTTONS

People often get in trouble with cropping when creating a photo button of a group. For this kind of image, you must have a *lot* of space around the group. To avoid costly errors, have the person taking the envelopes from each student tell you if the group portrait you are photographing is going to be used for any buttons. That way, you will know to leave lots of room around the subjects. Leaving room around your groups is a good idea anyway, though; you can always crop in once you know the final aspect ratio(s) needed for the various prints and products you are creating.



**ABOVE**—If you don't compose your image to be used as a button, chances are good that you won't have enough background around the subjects to show the whole team and fill the button area. **RIGHT**—Don't be afraid to try an unusual pose



for a photo button shot. For this button, the cheerleaders laid on the floor while I held a 24mm lens on a Canon 5D full frame sensor over them to create this image. I had an assistant hold an umbrella light over the group to create a soft light.

Whatever strategy you choose, the subjects' faces should be roughly equidistant. If they are not, subjects who are visually closer to each other will appear to be related in a way that others in the image are not. Similarly, a subject who is visually farther from the others in the portrait may seem to be removed from the group.

**Focus.** Focus is an additional concern when determining the spacing between subjects. In order to keep all of the faces in focus, they must fall within the plane of focus at the working aperture. With all but the smallest groups, this means that the subjects must be posed so that the faces of those in the back are as close as possible to those in the front.

To accomplish this, it may be necessary to have subjects in the back lean slightly forward. To maximize the zone of focus, you can also elevate the camera and angle it slightly down so that the lens plane is parallel (or close to parallel) to the plane of the subjects' faces. Keep in mind, however, that this can also cause lens distortion.



**IT IS IMPORTANT TO DO  
A FINAL CHECK OF THE POSING  
BEFORE TAKING THE PICTURE.**

In large groups, it may also be difficult to keep subjects at the edges of the frame in focus. This is because they are more distant from the lens than subjects at the center of the grouping. To resolve this issue, you can have the center subjects move back slightly and the subjects at the edge move forward slightly to bow the group around the lens. By posing the subjects along an arc in this manner, you can ensure that they are equidistant to the lens.

**Hierarchy.** There are two basic strategies for determining where individuals should be placed in a group portrait. The first strategy is to group the subjects into logical units (sections of the band, etc.). This is often done to allow the individual subgroups to be photographed separately from the larger group. The other strategy is to group the subjects by size and shape. Taller subjects might be placed in the back, for example.

**Final Check.** When photographing group portraits, it is important to do a final check of the posing before taking the picture. It can be hard for peo-



Sometimes you will even be asked to do a family portrait on a sports job.

ple to hold the desired pose, so some refinement will likely be needed from time to time. Particular attention should be paid to the edges of the group, where improper posing (such as a leg or arm seeming to project out from the group) will be particularly obvious in the final images.

Ultimately, each person in the image must look good. Keep in mind that, even in a large group, everyone looks at themselves first and must be satisfied with what they see.

### **BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE CHECK-BOOK HOLDER**

What make sports photography different than studio work is that none of your customers choose you. You are at the school or league job because the yearbook advisor or the league board chose you. As a result, many of the people you see at these types of jobs will never set foot into a high-end photography studio. Their idea of a portrait is something done at WalMart—or if they are *really* lucky, they will get one of those “gems” from the church directory.

We have a motto at our studio: Beauty in the eye of the check-book holder. If *they* like it and *they* paid for it, what more can we ask? Therefore, on league or school assignments, if the customer asks for a pose we always do it, even if we know it is not going to look good. As I mentioned earlier, though, we also do a pose that I know *will* look good. You always want to have an ace up your sleeve just in case someone gets something they don’t like and have forgotten whose idea the “bad” pose was. Always be polite and listen to the client. Remember, they did not hire you for the job.

**IF THEY LIKE IT**

**AND THEY PAID FOR IT,**

**WHAT MORE CAN WE ASK?**

## 8. HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH GAME ACTION

**Y**earbook advisors want good, clean, sharp images of all of the sports action. We provide yearbook sports photography to several schools, including all the game action from football, track, cross country, volleyball, boys' and girls' soccer, boys' and girls' basketball, softball, and baseball. Photographing these shots takes skill, a little bit of luck, and top-notch equipment.

Night football games sometimes require the use of on-camera flash to get action-freezing images.

### EQUIPMENT AND BASIC SHOOTING TECHNIQUES

To get excellent sports action pictures, you need the following equipment: a

35mm digital camera that can shoot at least four frames per second with autofocus; a 200–300mm lens with a constant f/2.8 aperture; a 28–105mm zoom (again with a constant f/2.8 lens opening); and a dedicated flash system. The only time you will probably use your flash is when you are photographing night football games. Using a flash during volleyball and basketball is sometime prohibited by the referees, so be sure to check before you starting firing! Although I don't find it necessary, some sports photographers like using a monopod rather than handholding the camera.

**Exposure.** Even with a 1600 or 3200 ISO setting on your camera, shooting at f/2.8 is imperative for both indoor and night photography (such as when photographing volleyball and football). Fast shutter speeds of at least  $\frac{1}{250}$  second are needed to stop the action, so you have to compensate for this light loss with a large aperture in order to produce a usable exposure. Sometimes you can get the action stopped with a









**ABOVE AND FACING PAGE**—In this series of photographs you can see the ball in play. Although difficult to get, showing the ball makes for outstanding game-action images.

shutter speed of  $\frac{1}{125}$  second, but I have found that  $\frac{1}{250}$  second works all the time. You will use the 200–300mm lens for all of your game-action photography except basketball and volleyball. The long lens works just fine for these two sports, but I have found a shorter zoom (28–105mm) is preferable.

**Focus.** If you have not done a lot of game-action work, it is going to take some practice to get good results. Your biggest problem will probably be staying focused on the athletes and not the background. Even with fast autofocus cameras, it is very easy to have a player run past your focus point, giving you tack-sharp spectators and a blurry subject in the foreground. Like anything else, the more you do it, the better you get.

### **KNOW THE SPORTS**

Knowing how all the different sports are played will give you an advantage. If you have at least a basic understanding of the rules, you can make sure you are in position and ready to capture the action at key moments. If you're not quite sure of the rules, you can't go far wrong by following the ball, puck, etc. If you study game-action photographs in sports magazines, you will notice that the best images almost always have the ball in the frame with the



player. Here are some additional tips that I have found helpful over the years when photographing game action. I will start with the fall sports and take you up to the end of the school year with spring sports.

**Football.** Football season usually starts in late August and runs for about ten weeks into late October (this may vary somewhat regionally). Probably the best tip I can give you for football game action is to get it done early in the season. First of all, in August and September, you will still have some daylight left early in the evening when the games are starting. Second, the weather is generally much better during late summer than late in the fall. You don't want to be photographing game action in hypothermia-inducing temperatures.

For football, you need at least a 200mm focal length. This will enable you to get most of the shots as you go up and down the field while the game is

**THIS WILL ENABLE YOU TO GET**

**MOST OF THE SHOTS AS YOU GO**

**UP AND DOWN THE FIELD.**



Early in the season, there's still some light in the early evening—making your football photography much easier.





Anticipating the peak action is a key factor in getting great soccer shots.

being played. When a good play is happening, get your focus locked on the action and just fire away—you are going to need a lot of shots to get a few good ones. You may also want to use a little bit of flash, depending on the lighting conditions. Night football games are played under stadium lights that many times aren't as bright as they should be. After all, these are high-school fields, not professional stadiums with a million watts of lighting.

I would recommend delivering at least thirty good game shots to the year-book advisor. Don't be surprised if you have to take over a hundred frames to get these pictures.

**Soccer.** When it comes to photography, boys' and girls' soccer is much like football. As with football, you will be going up and down the field to get the action shots. Some soccer games are now played at night, so try to get your action shots during daylight games and work early in the season to avoid cold weather. Fire off a lot of shots, then use editing and cropping in post-production to fine-tune each image and isolate the peak action. This will make your images look much better—and free you to shoot quickly without having to compose each image with extreme care.



A 28–105mm lens works well for capturing volleyball shots.

**Volleyball.** Volleyball is easier to shoot than soccer and football. You are indoors and, of course, you will be staying mostly in one spot near the net. For this type of photography, a fast 28–105mm lens works well. The fast lenses are expensive, but you don't have much choice if you want really strong images. I would not recommend using flash with volleyball game action—in fact, some referees and game commissions do not allow its use. Instead, set your shutter at  $\frac{1}{250}$  second with your aperture wide open and your ISO at 1600 to 3200.

**Golf and Cross Country.** Golf and cross country, being outside, will allow you to use smaller apertures—but you are still going to want to keep your shutter speeds fast. If you have a good relationship with the golf coach,

**THE FAST LENSES ARE EXPENSIVE,**

**BUT YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE**

**IF YOU WANT REALLY STRONG IMAGES.**

he may drive you around on a golf cart so you can get your shots quickly. At most high schools (and, again, this will vary by region), the golf season ends around the middle of September. This means you need to schedule your photography of golf leagues very close to the start of the school year.

**SCHEDULE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY  
OF GOLF LEAGUES VERY CLOSE  
TO THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.**

Working outdoors makes golf photography easier than some other sports, but you still need to keep your shutter speed fast to freeze the action.





**Tennis.** Tennis should not be difficult to photograph, as most matches take place outside. The action is constant and relatively easy to anticipate, so you should be able to get some great action pictures quickly. In fact, tennis is a good sport on which to practice your game-action skills if you are new to sports photography. A medium focal-length zoom lens works well, but be sure to keep your shutter speed fast enough to stop the ball in action.



**SOFTBALL AND BASEBALL GAMES**

**ARE TIME-CONSUMING TO COVER**

**IN THE SPRING.**

Tennis is a great sport to start with if you're new to shooting sports action.

When photographing girls' softball, I'm always amazed at how fast some of the pitchers can throw the ball. Sometimes you can actually hear it crossing home plate!



**YOU CAN PICK UP ABOUT TWO  
SHUTTER-SPEED STEPS BY USING  
AN IMAGE STABILIZATION LENS.**

**Softball and Baseball.** Softball and baseball games are time-consuming to cover in the spring. The action tends to be more intermittent than in other sports, so you have to be prepared to make the most of the opportunities that arise. Both games are played outside, however, so you don't need a really fast lens; a 300mm zoom works well. Remember, however, to keep your shutter speed setting equal to (or faster than) the inverse of the effective focal length of the lens you are using. Failing to do this will just about guarantee camera shake on your handheld images. (*Note:* If it's in your budget, you can pick up about two additional shutter-speed steps by using an image stabilization lens.)

An image that freezes the ball right at the batter's swing is always a crowd pleaser—but don't expect to get this picture on the first try. In addition to having all the proper skills, luck can also be a critical factor in getting a good shot.

## WHO TO PHOTOGRAPH

Don't get so focused on the superstars that you forget to document the role of the other players—even the ones who are sitting on the bench most of the time. Look for opportunities to capture these athletes when they are warming up. Or, after you have gotten the game-action shots that feature a lot of the main players on the team, get the other players while they are in a huddle or walking on or off the playing field/court. Everyone likes to be in the yearbook, so photograph everyone and let the yearbook staff decide who they are going to include.

## WHEN TO DELIVER THE IMAGES

It is best to deliver your game-action shots to the yearbook advisor as you photograph them, rather than waiting to deliver all of your images at the end of the season. With digital photography, it's easy and cost effective to give them a CD of the very best images from each game.

**DON'T GET SO FOCUSED ON**

**THE SUPERSTARS THAT YOU FORGET**

**TO DOCUMENT THE OTHER PLAYERS.**



Deliver your images to the yearbook advisor right away. When it's as easy as making a CD, there's really no excuse for delays!



Want to make your game-action shots do double duty? Start advertising and selling them to parents.

# Attention Parents!

Now you can get  
*Sports Illustrated*  
quality images of  
your student in  
the game from:

**Williams  
Photography**

—call—

**(330)847-0927**



Just give us your son or daughter's jersey number,  
and we will get **awesome** game-action shots for you!

*Packages start at \$49.95 for four 5x7s.*

*Other packages are available.*

**CALL WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHY TODAY!**

## SELLING GAME-ACTION PHOTOS

## CAN ENHANCE YOUR VISIBILITY

## IN THE COMMUNITY.

### ADDITIONAL INCOME FROM GAME ACTION

Although you will not make a great deal of money from selling game-action photos, they can enhance your visibility in the community. We have had little success marketing these photos to organized sports leagues, but much better results selling them to the high schools that we service. Just this year, we started enclosing a form in each athlete's team/individual photo package offering our services to photograph the players. You can also offer your photographs for sale on the Internet; just let the team, parents, and community know that your site is out there and that the game-action photos are available.

## 9. BUSINESS SKILLS: AFTER THE SHOOT

**A**t the start of this book, we dealt with some of the skills you need to develop to establish your business and attract clients. Now, we'll wrap up the book by looking at another facet of the business: the skills needed to complete and deliver orders to your clients. This includes handling payments, working with your lab, packaging your products, and more.

### HANDLING THE MONEY AND BANK DEPOSITS

Being in business for over twenty years has taught me a lot about people and their money, so please learn from my mistakes.

**Dealing with Bad Checks.** At our studio, we photograph a wide variety of subjects—weddings, high-school seniors, families, etc. Therefore, it's not unusual for us to receive checks in amounts of over a thousand dollars each. Yet, I can honestly say that in all my years in business I can count on one hand the bad checks we have received for orders over five hundred dollars. In fact, almost *all* of the bad checks we receive throughout the year are from our sports-league jobs. In fact, it is not uncommon to get bounced checks for packages as small as nine dollars. Many times, a family will have two or three children playing on different teams and a check will bounce for each child—so they end up with more bad check fees from the bank than what the photographs cost to begin with!

Today, we have an almost air-tight system for dealing with bad checks; this safeguards us from delivering a product that has not been paid for. The first thing you have to do is get the checks into the bank as soon as possible. It still takes several days for a check to get back to your bank showing insufficient funds, so depositing them right away allows you to try to collect your money before the photographs are delivered—good luck trying to collect a twelve-dollar check *after* you have delivered the pictures!

**Matching Checks and Subjects.** This tip I'm going to give you right now is worth the price of this book! I learned this from my brother several years ago. When you take the check out of the envelope *read the last name on the*

ALMOST ALL OF THE BAD CHECKS WE  
RECEIVE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR ARE  
FROM OUR SPORTS-LEAGUE JOBS.

## I COULDN'T MAKE THIS STUFF UP!

Most of the people you deal with are honest, polite, understanding, and nice. Yet there are some who really make you wonder. After receiving some very goofy calls, we decided one day to start keeping track of some of the more interesting excuses for failing to pay. I thought you might find some of these comments entertaining as well as educational. I use the word “educational,” because I don’t want you to think you are some kind of weirdo when you start getting these calls yourself. Also, you need to prepare yourself to deal with them. I’m fortunate to have an extremely talented lady handling our incoming calls; she has a real knack for listening and dealing with any type of situation, good or bad. So here are just a smattering of the comments we have received in the last twelve months when a customer did not receive their pictures for lack of payment.

1. “I never received notice from my bank that my check bounced for my children’s pictures.”
2. “I paid for my pictures on your web site.” (*We have no provision for payment of pictures on our web site.*)
3. “My check bounced . . . so I suppose you’re going to hold my pictures ‘hostage’ until I pay.”
4. “The check was written from the account I closed, and I never received notice from the bank.” (*She was employed at the bank the check was written from.*)
5. “No one called us from your studio when the check bounced.” (*Notice is sent directly to the customer from the bank.*)
6. “I couldn’t send in my payment. The post office didn’t have any stamps.”
7. “Do you have a courtesy discount for families who have kids in different sports that you photograph and buy lots of pictures?” (*Yes, this comment was from a lady who called after her check had bounced!*)

**BE AWARE OF THE POLICIES OF  
THE BANK YOU ARE DEALING WITH  
WHEN IT COMES TO DEPOSITS.**

*check to see if it matches the name of the player.* Given today’s divorce rate, there’s a good chance that the child’s last name is different than the name of the parent who wrote the check. If the names are different, write the frame number from the digital camera file onto the check. Otherwise, if the check bounces you will have no idea which athlete’s order to hold from delivery.

**Bank Policies and Deposit Fees.** I would also urge you to be aware of the policies of the bank you are dealing with when it comes to deposits with a lot of checks. About two years ago, our bank merged with another bank. We





**FACING PAGE**—Unlike film images, which offer greater latitude, digital files must have very tight exposures to yield good prints.

found out the hard way that the “new” bank charged a fee for every check deposited. The old bank charged by the deposit, not by the individual check. Needless to say, we had some steep bank fees. After shopping around, however, we found a bank with much more competitive fees.

**Credit Cards.** I would strongly recommend you accept credit cards for payment on your products. You will be assessed monthly bank fees for the service, but in today’s world I really don’t think you have much of an option. It’s almost unheard of not to take credit cards, and accepting them will increase your sales—particularly with the impulse buyers. Additionally, once the transaction is approved, you know you have the payment. This means fewer bounced-check hassles.

## **DEALING WITH YOUR PHOTO LAB**

If you have paid any attention to the photography business over the last several years, you don’t need me to tell you that the industry has been in a constant state of change. Digital photography has probably been the biggest change in the industry since photography was invented back in the mid 1800s. Many established photo finishers are out of business, and other new digital labs are popping up and doing quite well. Despite what the film diehards may think, digital is here to stay.

Unlike film images, digital files must have tight exposures and accurate white-balance settings to yield good prints from your lab. When sending your orders, you must also give clear, concise instructions. Many labs today use order-entry programs. These give the photographer total control over cropping, quantity of prints, adding the player’s name, etc.

The lab I use does all of our color correction. Other photographers prefer to do the color correction themselves. Personally, I don’t want to spend time color correcting our files. By having the lab color correct the images, I am also making them more responsible for producing quality prints. What it really comes down to is time or money. If you aren’t that busy and you want to sit in front of a computer, color correcting your own files may work for you. You may also have an employee who knows how to color correct, size, and crop your images.

After talking with a few labs, I found some common complaints labs have about photographers. Here are the major ones you should address.

**Educate Yourself.** Learn how to use your computer! Take a class on basic computer skills or hire someone who is computer literate to work for you. Your photo lab is not a computer training center.

**Internet.** Contrary to popular belief, your photo lab is not a technical support hotline. If you are having trouble sending files, call your Internet

## **IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE**

### **SENDING FILES, CALL YOUR**

### **INTERNET PROVIDER.**





**LEFT AND FACING PAGE**—Both kids and parents will be waiting with excitement to see their team photos—so don't keep them waiting! Get your files to the lab promptly and avoid processing delays by ensuring your notes to the lab are clear and simple.

provider. You must understand the flow of information and who is responsible for what.

**Calibrate Your Monitor.** If you are going to color correct your own files, be certain that your monitor is calibrated to match your lab. That's the only way to ensure that you are seeing the same color they are seeing.

**Be Clear and Concise.** Labs need good, clear communication on all orders. When adding special instructions to your orders, be certain to give simple, accurate instructions. Make sure, in addition, that any handwritten notes are extremely legible; if you have bad penmanship, let someone fill out the instructions for you. Lab employees look at hundreds of orders every day, and they are not mind readers. If they do not fully understand your instruc-

**LAB EMPLOYEES LOOK AT HUNDREDS  
OF ORDERS EVERY DAY, AND THEY  
ARE NOT MIND READERS.**







Leaving plenty of room around your subject ensures that the lab will be able to easily crop the image for any photo print size or novelty item.

tions, they must pull the order and call you. If they can't get you on the telephone, they will have to put the order aside until you call them back. Of course, this delays everything. Poor communications with your photo finisher will cause nothing but problems and delays.

**Leave Room for Cropping.** When photographing your subjects, be sure to leave room in the camera for proper cropping. Shooting with a digital camera, you are seeing an image with an aspect ratio that is about the same as a 4x6-inch print. The bulk of the products that team sports photographers sell, however, are at different ratios—closer to those in an 8x10-inch print. As a result, cropping an image too tightly can lead to increased expenses from having to add background areas around the subject(s). I suggest making samples of the trinkets you offer and determining the best cropping for each.

**Rush Jobs.** Not every job can be a rush job. Photo finishers offer a rush service to their customers when, on a rare occasion, they need something

**I SUGGEST MAKING SAMPLES**

**AND DETERMINING THE BEST**

**CROPPING FOR EACH.**

within a day or two. Senior portraits, for example, sometimes need a rush to meet a yearbook deadline. Unfortunately, many photographers abuse the rush service offered by their photo finisher. They fail to submit their jobs in a timely manner, then expect the lab to jump through hoops to make up for it! Most labs charge a hefty rush fee, but I have found that if you *rarely* ask for a rush—and have a well-established, long-term relationship with the lab—they will often forgo the fee. (*Note:* If a client comes into your studio and wants something quickly, don't be afraid to charge them accordingly. In this case, they are ultimately the ones who should be paying for the rush service.) You may want to invest in a desktop printer so you can produce small prints on the fly.

Getting a great shot of each athlete is just the first part of your job. You also have to package and deliver all the images professionally.

**Pay on Time.** Pay your lab account on time—or, better yet, pay it as soon as you receive the bill. If you establish a stellar payment history with your lab, they will not want to lose you as a customer. Your lab is not a savings and loan company; they have employees and equipment to pay for, just like you! If you are not able to make your lab payment on time each and every month,

something is wrong somewhere. Examine your prices and overhead; chances are you will find major clues as to where the problem is.

### **PACKAGING THE JOB**

We have previously discussed making a positive impression on your customers (see chapter 1). Before the shoot, this is done with your telephone skills, the décor of your studio, and with your pricing brochures and other promotional materials. After the sale, you can create a good impression by packaging each order professionally. All of these things send a message to the customer as to what they may expect as far as service and product are concerned. I've seen some mighty interesting examples of how *not* to make an impression with a client. One of my more recent favorites was some packaging I saw for underclass pictures. My studio manager's two children, who attend school in a neighboring community, had their school pictures taken by a local part-time photographer. When the photographs were delivered to the kids about five weeks after picture day, they were in freezer bags with absolutely no other protection!







By the time the kids got their pictures home, they were riddled with dents, creases, and bends. Anyone with half a brain should have realized that the pictures needed some sort of cardboard protection—especially since they were likely to be transported home in the kids’ backpacks and bookbags. The saddest part is that the packaging reflected the product inside; the pictures had been poorly done and the freezer bag was the finishing touch on a lousy product.

Invest in some professionally made packaging materials. Have your studio’s name, address, and phone number printed on the bags or boxes you buy to create a first-class impression of your products and service. Beyond that, however, try to think like the person who has the task of passing out all of the pictures to the players and/or coaches.

You’ll have a lot of images to deal with, so be sure to label everything clearly. This will make the distribution of the images much easier.

Let's assume we are delivering images to a baseball league with over 400 players. To start, each player's order is carefully checked for accuracy and packaged in a clear plastic bag that bears the name of the team and the individual player. Accuracy is imperative. Nobody likes to wait two to three weeks for their pictures only to find they are missing a photo button or have the wrong team photo. When assigning someone to package your orders, be certain that they are detail oriented. You don't want a lot of calls from irate parents over something that should have been right the first time.

Returning to the bags, within each one, the photo buttons are placed in bubble bags so that the pins will not scratch any of the other photographs. If the print order is not going into a photo mount, we insert a thin piece of cardboard in the bag so that the pictures will not crease. The envelopes are then grouped by team and alphabetized by player name. When the job is delivered to the league president, he simply reads off the team names and passes out the bags to the coaches. This makes the whole process as simple as possible. This leads us to our next point . . .

### **MAKE IT EASY FOR THE COACHES**

Getting as many coaches as possible on your side will help you win the contract the following year—and you can be sure that they talk to one another, so a good reputation may even help you get other jobs. Doing what you can to make their job easy will go a long way. Here's how *not* to do it: a new photographer in my area once delivered a high-school sports job to the athletic director at an area high school. The pictures were all stacked on top of one another in a box. The buttons, magnets, and other novelty items were in one bag, and the photo mounts were in another. The photographer then told the athletic director to “figure it out” and gave the pictures to the players. Sad to say, this photographer is no longer in business; I was at the bankruptcy auction at his studio last year. It's a small thing, but simply offering to pass out the pictures could have made a huge difference.

### **EXCEED YOUR DELIVERY TIMES**

One of the biggest complaints I hear about sports photography involves very late delivery times. Most, if not all, of the excuses for late delivery times are the fault of the photographer.

With orders being sent over the Internet to your photo finisher, you can have a job back in just a few days. For example, we send large jobs to our lab over the weekend and have them back on Wednesday—and these are complex orders with several hundred players and requests for photo buttons, magnets, magazine covers, personalized trading cards, and more! There is

**ONE OF THE BIGGEST COMPLAINTS I**

**HEAR ABOUT SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY**

**INVOLVES VERY LATE DELIVERY TIMES.**

simply no excuse for the players waiting any more than three weeks to get their pictures. Moms like to wear their photo buttons when they go to the games, and the kids want to exchange trading cards—and that’s not going to happen if the photographs are sitting in your office or studio waiting to get packaged.

We even hire extra help to package the orders so we can get them out promptly. After all, having the players and parents waiting five to six weeks for their pictures is a surefire way not to get the assignment next year.

### **FOLLOW UP AFTER THE JOB HAS BEEN DELIVERED**

Communication is important before, during, and after the job. Make it a point to contact the people who hired you and let them know you are thankful for the work and that you would be interested in obtaining the assignment again next year. Also, be sure to pass along any compliments you may have received. Many times, the people who hire the photographer never hear (or even ask if there were) any problems with delivery times or products.

**WE EVEN HIRE EXTRA HELP**

**TO PACKAGE THE ORDERS SO WE**

**CAN GET THEM OUT PROMPTLY.**



Delivering the images on time is an important step in getting the contract again next year.



**W**ell, as they say at the end of the cartoon, “That’s all, folks!” I sincerely hope that you have found this text educational, informative—and maybe even a little entertaining. The information has been obtained by me mostly through the school of hard knocks. If you have any questions about any part of this book feel free to contact me at [james@jwilliamsphoto.com](mailto:james@jwilliamsphoto.com). Thank you for taking the time to read this book—and good luck with all your team sports photography!

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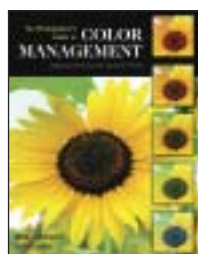
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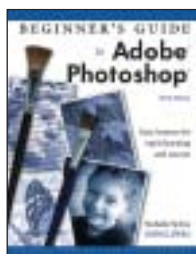
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